

Diary of a Cult

A Visit to The Overcomer;
Ralph G. Stair's Socialist View of God's Kingdom.

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*Dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, even God Almighty, who
created all things in truth as preserved in the **Authorized King James
Version** exclusively.*

*Special thanks to those who helped with this project. This book is strictly
educational.*

Preface

In the total scheme of the events which are occurring in this troubled world, this story is among the most insignificant. It is because of my knowledge of the current and tragic events unfolding in world history that I found myself, like many others, seeking to understand the forces capable of orchestrating such a massive world conspiracy against all that is decent. Too, I found myself confused about the extreme apathy of the populations of people who, when told of the dangers which await them, turn their heads toward those who preach of peace and safety and defame the bringers of truth and warning.

It is God who brought me to the truth. It is God who showed me that his Word will be fulfilled. And it is God who brought me through the events about which I write; though the story is of minor import, it is still valuable as a witness to others.

This story is about a visit I made to a "Christian" community, called the *Overcomer*, headed by Ralph G. Stair. Located in a picturesque little town of Walterboro, South Carolina, the *Overcomer* ministry has become world known over the fantastic influence of Short Wave radio broadcasts - acknowledgeably the last harbinger of truthful world news.

My visit with the *Overcomer* people lasted only a week. Granted, not much can be learned about an entire organization and its people in such a short time. My story is one sided; from my point of view; but told as truthful as I can possibly tell it. It is not my intent to attack anyone by this writing, though I am sure some may accuse me of doing so. It is my hope that those who this tells of will also find a positive help in it as to make them better representatives of Christianity than they currently are.

Whenever possible I used the true first names of the characters. A few individual's names escaped me, or were not learned. Substitutions are indicated. No surnames are revealed so as to protect the identities of anyone choosing to leave the *Overcomer* community.

I kept a personal log of events as they happened from day to day, so none of the events or conversations are exaggerations. I only wish I had had a tape recorder along. It was not my intention from the beginning to write a book, but I had the feeling from the beginning that I should keep a notes. I'm glad I did.

Introduction

In late June of 1994, after much consideration over the passed six months, I made arrangements to move to East Texas where, in a small town called Gladewater, I joined “Brother Ben” on his twenty-four acre forested property. My plan was to leave California for good, to live on and help farm Brother Ben’s land, and help him with his ministry effort *Seventieth Week Magazine*. At the time, Brother Ben had a short-wave radio broadcast on WWCR, and I wanted to encourage that as well. However, those plans changed due to some unforeseen circumstances and I felt I had to leave Gladewater after six months.. Since I didn’t want to go back to California, I thought hard about my next move. (Brother Ben’s magazine *Seventieth Week* can be ordered by writing P.O. Box 771, Gladewater, Texas, 75647.)

For more than three years I had conversed with a fellow named Ralph G. Stair (“Brother Stair”) who has a short wave radio broadcast over WWCR (of Nashville, Tennessee) out of Walterboro, South Carolina. Stair is the head of an organization called *The Overcomer*. Attached to the *Overcomer*’s outreach program is a fully operational diversified eighty acre farm and “Christian” commune. I telephoned Stair and told him I would like to come and see his operation, and possibly stay and work on the farm for three months to learn about Christian living and farming. He accepted this idea with one stipulation; “As long as you behave yourself ,” he commanded.

I was not completely ignorant of Ralph Stair’s personality. I had some concern about a personality clash between us, but I reasoned that good Christian folk could always work out their differences over a period of time. I made the decision to make the 1250 mile trip, said good-bye to my friends in Texas, loaded up the Volkswagen Vanagon and Datsun long bed trailer, and was on my way by December 6, 1994.

It is no easy trip across country in an “81 Vanagon towing a trailer, and I knew it was a big decision. I wanted the journey to be worth the while, not to mention the expense, for prospect of returning the 3000 miles to California didn’t appeal to me. I became excited about learning all I could about diversified farming, and I felt very strongly that God was sending me in this direction. I put all of my concerns onto God’s shoulders. In retrospect, everything that occurred on this trip had a purpose. Overall it turned out to be a great test of faith. My purpose for going to the *Overcomer* was kept secret from me and revealed only when the entire experience was over. From the first day, by God, I knew to write everything down. The following is the shocking account taken from my personal notes of that short seven days visit to the *Overcomer*.

Other than spelling and sentence syntax corrections, the following is just as I originally wrote it from my notes. Please excuse any roughness in the writing.

A Quick Lesson from our Past

In 1620, the Pilgrims Fathers of America landed at Plymouth rock to start a new community on the new land. Divine providence had given them an enclave of relative safety in a hostile land. They first set up a society based on communal sharing. It was their plan from the beginning to have a “communist” society. In many ways it was set up under the most favorable conditions. They were isolated from outside influences, and they were desperately motivated to survive due to that isolation. They also had a strong religious conviction and were fraternally inclined toward one another. They were young and industrious people. Their leader was Governor William Bradford.

Here is what Bradford wrote of this experiment in communal living:

“This community... was found to breed much confusion and discontent and retard much employment that would have been to their benefit and comfort. For the young men that were most fit for labor and service did repine that they should spent their time and strength to work for other men’s wives and children without any recompense. The strong... had no more division in victuals and clothes than he that was weak and not able to do a quarter the other could. This was thought an injustice... and for men’s wives to be commanded to do service for other men, as dressing their meet, washing their clothes, etc., they deemed it a kind of slavery, neither could many husbands well brook it.”

Yes, even in devout Christian societies, communism always turns into a dictatorship where some will be slaves to the commands to others. The colonists would have continued to endure this socialistic society if it had been productive. However, severe problems arose. The involuntary servitude which developed caused many to act harshly and dishonestly toward one another. The weak were mistreated and the strong became unwilling to work without threat of force. The colonist soon faced starvation!

Bradford continues, “At length, after much debate... the governor gave way that they should set corn every man for his own purpose and in that regard trust to themselves... and assign to every family a parcel of land according to the proportion of their number.”

In other words, the community discontinued the communal style of living and set the law that every man would have to take care of himself if he were to survive. In the course of one year Bradford was able to report:

“This had very good success; for it made all hands very industrious, so that much more corn was planted than otherwise would have been... The women now went willing into the fields, and took their little ones with them to set corn, which before would allege weakness and inability; whom to have compelled would have been thought great tyranny and oppression.”

Governor Bradford had discovered a great human secret; that a man will compel himself to go much farther than he will permit any one else to compel him to go. He continues: “...the experience that was had in this common cause and condition, tried sundry years, and that amongst godly and sober men, may well evince the vanity of that conceit of Plato and other ancients - applauded by some in later times - that the taking away of property, and bringing it into a commonwealth, would make them happy and flourishing; as if they were wiser than God.”

The foregoing is exactly what I found being nurtured within the *Overcomer* Community. The men and women were so contentious, so untrustworthy amongst each other, so oppressed by their leader(s), that I found the living there intolerable even for the

short time. Does Ralph G. Stair, the professed “Last Days Prophet,” think himself wiser than God? I do truly believe he does at times. If the *Overcomer* community is to survive, they will have to make great and drastic changes. Its members are intelligent and will only stand their servitude for a time. Members will continue to splinter off with discontent and bitter feelings, and possibly with a destroyed faith in our Lord Jesus Christ - God forbid. This community serves as a direct example of the fact that those who refuse to learn from the past are destined to repeat it to their own destruction. Almost four-hundred years ago our founding Fathers found out that the human spirit is not fit for the confinement of communal service. Anyone who thinks that God has this in plan for his soon to come Kingdom is grossly mistaken!!

Chapter 1

Wednesday, December 7.

I've been traveling all last night and today crossing Louisiana, and Mississippi. Traveling over the Mississippi river was exciting because I saw it just as the sun was coning up. I now find myself in a rough little town called Demopolis, Alabama. I checked into a cheesy motel along the main strip (highway 80) at 18:00 - across from a Taco Bell. This is not a pleasant place to be knowing that the California plates on my van and trailer have drawn more than a few glances from the highly noticeable thriving crime element here.

Hungry, I walked across the street to the Taco Bell. It was just getting dark, and the prostitutes were out in full view - on a Wednesday night. Those gals don't miss a trick. At about 22:00, before going to sleep, I went out to check my rig and was approached by a young black woman.

"Excuse me, do you have a match?" she called out from a distance.

She approached quickly. She was wearing tight pink pants and a white jacket. She didn't look particularly clean or healthy, and the greasy dreadlocks in her hair didn't help her appearance either.

"No, sorry," I replied. "Are you out working tonight?"

"Yeah, are you interested?"

"Can't say I am. I know you've got to eat, but might you be better off finding another line of work. You're doing a dangerous thing, not to mention the risk of terrible diseases. There is a God in Heaven you know."

"You're probably right. But I do gotta eat. You sure you're not interested?" she repeated. I declined and off she went, as quickly as she came, asking some other fellow for a match.

Thursday, December 8.

I finally arrived in Walterboro, South Carolina at 20:00. Though It was getting dark, I can see a definite improvement between this town and Demopolis. I got very little rest there, but here I'll sleep well.. I left Deomopolis early and hit Montgomery around 9:30. A mix up on the road system sent me back in the wrong direction, and the episode cost a hour loss in time. Other than that, the trip was without event.

While traveling through Georgia, I came to a traffic detour where cars were stopped by law enforcement. Drivers were handed brochures and asked opinions about a possible new intrastate rail system to replace excessive highway usage. I found that quite curious knowing that the powers that be dislike the idea of people moving about freely. A rail system is the perfect control mechanism.

Upon arriving in Walterboro, I stopped at a restaurant called The Waffle House. It is just off the highway next to a large fireworks store. It has been a long time since I've seen a legal fireworks stand, let alone one so grand. I started talking to the two women working in the restaurant. One was about 50 years old and black, and the other an average looking 30 year old tall white woman who smoked a cigarette. The younger woman spoke with remarkable diction and intelligence. This encouraged me to converse

with her more intently as I finished my meal and prepared to leave. She's a Christian and I asked her which Bible she reads, and she indicated it was the New International Version. I witnessed to her about the superiority of the King James Version, telling her about the New Age Cult connection to all the new translations. At first she was hostile to the idea so I gave her specific examples of the corruption in the new texts.. Then her face became very bright.

“Let me tell you, I'm a new Christian and just left behind a life in the New Age movement. What you are saying makes so much sense now, I believe you could be absolutely right,” she exclaimed.

I gave her some information and told her that I would try to see her again and give her some more stuff. It is good to find intelligent and seeking people once in a while. I told her also to get a clue from the Bible titles; for example, “New International Version” really matches the phrase “New World Order!” Because Satan “must needs to boast”.

It looks like it will rain tomorrow.

Chapter 2

Friday, December 9.

It rained last night and part of today, which wound up being a big factor in the day's events.

I got a good night's sleep under the assurances of town's folk that crime is rare in Walterboro. I was up and on the road by 8:00 and spent some time driving around town seeing the sights. Located 50 miles west of Charleston on Interstate Route 96, Walterboro is a picturesque country town with green forests of oak, pine, and cedar, rolling grassy fields, and large farms. There's a noticeable difference in the species of trees between these and the equally plush forests of East Texas. Seeing the beautiful land excited me all the more about getting down to some real farming work.

The *Overcomer* front property is located south of downtown Walterboro on State Highway 15. The big sign which reads *Overcomer Ministry, Faith Tabernacle, and Overcomer Inc.* is easily seen as approached. The property is of good size - I would estimate ten acres or more. The building style and layout gives the impression that the place used to be a public school.

I pulled into the long lengthwise school bus style driveway at 9:30. It was cold and drizzling still, but the pavement wasn't real wet.. There are three visible buildings, as I recall, situated around a large square fenced lawn. To the north is a one level building, to the east a workshop style building, and to the south an auditorium styled building. Numerous dogs run loose within the fenced yard. Not seeing any signs point toward an office, I went to the north building as I could see activity within.

I approached apprehensively, wondering if I was expected and how I would be received. Warm air rushed out toward me as I opened the side door and entered. Inside I saw women scurrying everywhere around a large kitchen. Other than a few glancing smiles, they took little notice of me as I observed their movements. The women, mostly middle aged or better, all wear no cosmetics, have long hair, and wear dresses which went to the floor. From first sight, though thinking none were strikingly beautiful, I thought it very attractive to see women dressed like Godly women. I could see they had been working a long time in this warm kitchen for the perspiration which ran down their faces. It didn't take me long to realize that I walked into the wrong building.

Two or three minutes passed until I was approached by an attractive younger white woman who, based on a previous description and also on her authoritative mannerism, I would guess to have been Mrs. Stair. She's about 5' 5'' tall and was wearing a white top and a light solid blue floor length skirt.

"Can I do something for you?" she asked in a stern voice.

"Hi," I said, "I'm Mark. I'm here from San Diego."

"Is there something you want here. What can I do for you?" she asked as if totally unaware that I was coming, and annoyed that I was in her way. Most people would have been surprised to see someone from so far away. But she was totally cold.

"I believe I'm expected. I've come to stay with you all a while. Is Brother Stair here?"

"No, but he'll be here soon. Follow me and you can talk to Brother Curt while you wait."

She led south through the kitchen and through the door opening onto the large fenced lawn, where I was immediately greeted by four very curious big dogs. They were all mutts and badly in need of baths. Though cautious at first, I discovered the dogs to be very friendly.

“Brother Curt,” she called out when he came into view. “This is Brother Mark. Will you talk to him until Brother Stair comes back?”

“Hi,” I said reaching out my hand, “I’m Mark.”

Curt gave a half hearted unenthusiastic hand shake as he looked at me with a sideways suspicious glare. His eyes were clear but intense, as if trying to calculate what terrible thing I might be up to. Curt is a white man with a full face of dark brown or black hair. He’s not a big guy; about my size and height of 5’ 11” and 170 pounds. He was dressed in coveralls and looked as if he’d been working on some machinery.

“So, why are you here?” he asked in an unfriendly tone.

“I came here to stay and work two or three months to learn farming and to see how a Christian community functions.”

“Oh?”

“Why do I get the feeling this is a big surprise to you all?”

“I’ve heard of you over the radio sometimes,” Curt said, making up for being uninformed.

We did some small talking for about two minutes, and it was obvious that he was not going to get friendly. So I moved off and started petting the stinky dogs.

“What do you do?” Curt asked

“For the past six months I was in Texas helping Brother Ben with his ministry until that work was done. Before that, I worked as an auto mechanic and handyman in San Diego.”

“Oh!” Curt said perking up. “You work on engines and stuff?”

“That’s what I like best. Working on machines.” This revelation improved Kurt’s attitude considerably, and the conversation improved.

Thirty minutes had passed. My back was to the kitchen, when from behind I heard a commotion approaching. I turned and from out of the kitchen door approached a disgruntled looking man making grumbling sounds in my direction. He approached in a zigzag circling fashion looking me up and down and speaking unpleasantries at me. It was as if a dog circling an adversary.

“I was looking out upon you from the door and asking myself, well well well lets see what kind of a bad spirit we have in this one.,” he said in a gruff challenging voice. He is short 5’ 7”, well fed, bottle shaped, flinty old fellow. On his gray hared round wrinkled face was a hard gape. His eyes searched me up and down continuously.

“Hello brother Ralph,” I said sticking out my hand. “Good to finally meet you in person.”

“Don’t you try to snow job me young man. I’ve been tried to be snowed by the best of them, and you ain’t gonna snow job me, no sir.” He circled me twice as if preparing for an altercation. “Well well well.”

“Hey, I’m not here to snow job anyone,” I said smiling while taking off my cap to reveal a full head of snow white hair. My attempt at levity had no effect.

“I know you. You’re a talker. Your kind always is. Are you going to learn to shut up and do as your told? ...Got nothing to say huh? That’s a good start. You came

here to work; well you're going to work. And just *maybe* we'll be able to straighten you out.." He stopped circling and looked up at me with a big creased grin revealing his mouth full of yellow and missing teeth. "How does that sound?"

"I must be here for *some* reason," I said undaunted by his attack.

"We're going to do just fine brother," he said smiling jovially and grabbing my arm. "I think we're going to get along just fine. Brother Curt will tell you how to get to the farm from here. I may be coming along a little later. There's no time to talk any longer. Sabbath is coming and there's work to do to prepare for the Sabbath services tonight. Good to see you had a safe trip. Just go right in through the gate to the end of the dirt road. The brothers are waiting for you."

"I've got a trailer on my van. I'm not going to get stuck in the mud on the dirt road am I?" I asked.

"It's a good road. Don't worry." He disappeared quickly back into the kitchen..

2

I arrived at the front gate of the *Overcomer* farm at 11:00. The farm is close to ten miles from the other place. It is secluded by a surrounding forest, and I missed the entrance the first time by it. The metal cattle rail gate which crosses the entrance was open, and I drove through cautiously looking for mud holes. I thought to myself as I moved along, "Stair is right. This is a very good road." The trees thinned out as I approached a series of clearings. Half way up the gently curved road, on the right, is a branch road which looked like it went into some woods. I continued straight and came to a big clearing and to another right going branch road. Down this road is seen buildings on both sides, and rows of mobile homes. This road looked too like it went into some woods. I found out later that the two roads meet to form a big loop. The place now appeared to be a large quaint settlement. It looked typical of a makeshift backwoods town.

I continued straight, now quite a ways inside the farm, and crossed over a drainage channel. In view now was a series of work shops on the right, other buildings on the left, and a very large muddy field straight ahead. This was the end of the road. A big flat turn around area was at the end.

Men were moving about and I waved at them as I passed. I wanted to turn around in case I would have to move the van back the way I came, and ahead looked to be large enough area to do so. The flat area on the left was not a firm as it appeared, and as I completed my turn, and was nearly straight, the right side of the van slipped right to the axles in the mud. The van was stuck good. I wasn't embarrassed about getting stuck, it just happened. Well, I had made it all the way without a hitch. If I was finally to have something difficult happen, at least it was here among helping hands. Nothing to do now but stop, get out and introduce myself.

The man approaching me didn't hold my optimistic view. He is a big white man in his late fifties, 6' 4" tall, 210 pounds or more, with short black hair, a clean shaved face, and dressed in drab navy blue coveralls. He shook his head disapprovingly at me as he approached.

"Well, I've arrived," I said looking at him and then back at my latest and greatest trick.

“You almost made it too. But I knew you were going to get stuck. It’s typical of your kind,” he said.

“I’m Mark from San Diego.”

“I’m Brother Dave.” Dave had a pleasant look on his face, but I could tell that like Curt, he was busy analyzing how he was going to accept me. “Let’s move over here and talk out of the wet weather,” he continued. “That will be okay there for now. We’ll get some of the boys to help push it out later.”

“It will be easy enough I guess seeing the tractors you have here. I could unhook the trailer too. That will help,” I added.

“Don’t worry about it brother,” Dave insisted. “You’re here now with nowhere else to go. Come on over here and meet some of the boys.”

We walked toward the shops on the right side of the drive. Facing them, on the left are two shabby looking garages which house tractors and parts. To the right is an open front work shop. In the center is a raised blue enclosed shed with a ramp going up into it. Next are a few other open front places with a path between them, and far right the main open front workshop. The row of structures look ramshackle, but functional and organized.

Three fellows emerged from the main shop and Dave introduced me. Before every person’s first name is placed the article “Brother.” Brother Mike, the first of the three, is a short white intelligent looking man. He is 5’ 7” tall, 150 pounds, wearing jeans and green sectional jacket, clean shaved, wears glasses and is quiet and reserved. Brother Tim is a big white guy wearing coveralls. He has a thick face of hair, is 200 pounds, and 6’ tall. And Dennis is a black man wearing jeans and a blue jacket, and the same size as Tim. Dennis and Tim are both around 30 years old, and Mike is near 40.

As we talked, Dave lead the conversation while the others stood quietly speaking only to back up Dave’s points. He talked a little about the farm and their goals.

“I don’t like to say this too much,” Dave began to say, “but I think it’s important to mention to you who I am. You see, Brother Stair, he’s the Prophet. Now me, I’m just an old evangelist. I’ve preached in many more places than Brother Stair has or ever will. I’ve got the gifts... all the gifts of the Lord. I’ve prophesized, spoken in tongues, healed sick people and all that. *And I run this farm.* Brother Stair can’t be here because he’s the Prophet and needs to be on the radio. But if something ever happened to him, I could replace him immediately.. You see, on this farm I am Brother Stair. We’re the same. He and I are one. You’ll learn that I’m never wrong Brother. Because if I’m wrong, then you’re saying that the Prophet is wrong. And if the Prophet is wrong, then you’re saying God is wrong; and that can’t be. The Prophet Brother Stair is next to God, and I’m next to the Prophet.”

I was getting an uneasy feeling about this Dave, and about his relationship to the guys. So I thought it might be time about time to at least get the van out of the mud. Dave was already telling the men his version of my arrival.

“Yeah, I saw Brother Mark coming down the road, going into the turn...I just knew he was going to get stuck. He almost made it. I wouldn’t have tried it though. Would have made it if you went a little more right. It wasn’t a good move.”

I could tell he was trying to put me down as he spoke. Dave is a Southerner with a strong accent. His words have a short clip at the end which gives the impression of conceit. Dave is definitely the authority figure around here, and his speech pattern fits

his personality well. As he speaks, he puts his hands in his pockets and rocks on his heels and toes landing flat as he makes a strong point. This man loves to control.

“I was fooled by the smooth wet area over there. It looked like part of the driveway. Hard to tell sometimes in wet conditions. But things like that happen,” I replied.

“You’re not embarrassed?” Dave remarked.

“No. I’m just glad I made it here before something like it happened.”

“Amazing. You really aren’t embarrassed,” Dave said shaking his head and landing on his heels.

“It will be easy to unstick it if you would help me, “ I said moving in that direction. “I can unhook the trailer and we can put the tractor on the ball hitch...”

“Brother Mark, don’t worry. It’s not in the way there for now.” Dave said.

“Still I’d feel better if we could do it now. I don’t want the guys to push it out. As yet I don’t have any major dents, and it’s packed full of stuff. Can you help me?”

As I began unhooking the trailer, Dave motioned to the some guys to give a hand. He called for a tall black man named Wayne to bring a tractor and chain. It didn’t take but a few minutes to pull the van out and hook the trailer back up. I felt a lot better and thanked the men greatly for their help. Dave was not happy with me over this though. He took it as a challenge to his authority.

“We’ve got no more time for fun now. It’s just after noon and Sabbath is coming. So back to work. Brother Mark, I’m sending someone to get Brother John. He’ll show you where your house is. In the mean time we’re winding down, so there’s nothing we can have you do right now. John will come soon.” Dave then turned and went away.

I followed Mike, Tim and Dennis into the big shop where they were working on a project attaching an electric motor to a large grain elevator. As I observed, I noticed they had rigged up a contraption to use a left running motor to do a right running job. It wasn’t going to work unless the motor was very strong. When they plugged it in, the motor just hummed. They tried pushing the paddles in the elevator, but the motor wasn’t going to work. It was then I stepped up and looked at the machine.

“I think your motor is no good,” I said. “It’s not even getting hot.”

They agreed with me and I started helping them work. Dave appeared suddenly from nowhere and motioned at me. “Brother Mark, they know what they’re doing. Come away from there. Brother John is on his way to get you.”

The other men just looked quickly at Dave and went back to work saying nothing. They were not going to say anything in my defense. Dave again disappeared, and I went back to watching the guys work from afar. The grain elevator is heavy and almost fell once, so I ran to help catch it. I found myself helping out again to their thanks. But they didn’t warn me that Dave would be quite unhappy.

“Brother!” I heard as Dave approached. “Now I told you that you are bothering these Brothers. Please please come away from them. Look, here’s Brother John. Go with him okay.”

Dave’s personality and attitude were very shocking to me. Never before had I been treated in such an adverse fashion. I was glad to see John arrive. I introduced myself.

“We’ll need to ride in your van, “ John said. “The house is kind of far.” I got the feeling John was looking foreword to riding in the van.

We Got into my van and drove back down the long driveway to the first branch road which I saw coming in. Turning left, we passed a clump of trees and came to a clearing with a row of mobile homes on the left. We stopped at the first one in a row of four.

John is an average sized white fellow, about my size of 5' 11" tall, 170 pounds, and 32 years old or so. He, like Curt and Tim, has let his facial hair grow full. It gives them a kind of biblical appearance when coupled with the surroundings and their way of dress - or even that good ol' unsophisticated farm boy look. It's simple and appealing in a way, except on John it looks sheepish for some reason. Like he's given up a lot somehow and submitted to something. That's the impression his personality gave me too as we conversed. I'm also not sure he's very trustworthy. Something in his eyes.

John showed me my room first. It is located on the lower end of the first trailer. This trailer, 40 feet long and 12 feet wide and dark brown, is the oldest looking in the park, but very adequate. It has three entrances, two on the right side at either end, and one on the left. Each entrance has a small covered porch and wooden steps up. My room is 10 feet by 12 feet, and nicely furnished.. It is separated from John's room by an office partition which nearly touches the ceiling. John explained that the gap up top is to allow heat to flow in from the other end of the coach where the wood stove is.

On the other end of the coach is a common living room between John's room and another room occupied by another man named Marc. This is where the wood stove sits. John said that the living room is for the three of us to rest and fellowship. There is a couch and a table. But the room looks and smells very unkempt, musty and uninviting.

The entrance on the other side then is John's room door.

My room is very nice. It has a well dressed double bed and night stands on each side. On the left is a standing closet, a desk and chair, and a lounge. At the front is a dresser. On the dresser is a speaker box which John pointed out to me. When plugged in, it puts out the 24 hour satellite broadcast of the *Overcomer* message. Unfortunately, John explained, there is no knob to control the volume . It is either on full or off. John showed how a pillow could work to muffle the sound.

Leaving the trailer, we met Marc coming in. After a brief introduction, John took me to see the Out House trailer. It is the third in the row of coaches with two entrances. A women's latrine and a men's latrine. And what an awful place it is. Because it is a community bathroom used by children and adults alike, it is a frightful mess. There are a few showers in a row, a few unflushed bowls in a row, a couple of stalls, and one wash sink. John must have noticed a reaction out of me because he apologized for the conditions.

"This is the bathroom. Sorry it doesn't smell good or look too clean. There's another one for us near Fellowship Hall that's just being repainted, so it's really cleaned up," John assured me.

"I'll show you where the laundry room is next," he continued.

"Good," I said, "I do have some laundry to wash."

"The women do the laundry for us on Wednesdays."

"I like to do it myself. I don't let anyone else do my stinky clothes. I'd be embarrassed if total strangers did my laundry for me."

"That's not allowed. The women do all the laundry," John insisted. "We'll have to talk to Brother Dave about you wanting to do your own laundry. He'll be unhappy."

As we approached our coach I asked, “Will you help me unhook and park my trailer over there so my van can be free for running to town for supplies?”

“You won’t need to go to town, just ask Dave for what you need. He’ll get it for you.”

“There may be some free time I have though, and I’d like to look around the town while I’m here.”

John looked sideways at me and said, “There is no free time. That’s not allowed anyway. No one goes to town. There’s no need. Besides, if you go, everyone else will want to go, and they don’t have cars.”

“Would people get envious of that?”

“You had better talk to Dave before you unload. If you already have trouble with the rules, you might not want to stay.”

“That’s okay,” I said, “I’m here now. But I’m doing my own laundry. Help me unhook.”

After unhooking, John asked what I had in my trailer. What could anyone possibly have that took so much space? I told him it was all of my stuff and books and tools. He expressed some bewilderment toward why I would need anything else with me besides clothing, as everything he needs is provided by the farm. I explained that people usually have stuff to live with, like dishes and books etc.. But why doesn’t he know that? Of course he knows that.

We started walking through the park toward the workshops when we met an older woman coming toward us. She was smiling and happy to meet me. She lives next door in the second trailer with another old lady roommate. I can’t remember her name right now. She is short and well fed looking, and I can tell she used to be handsome woman in her younger years. She is still pleasant looking though, and very nice. *(Note: I forgot this woman’s name and from here on she will be called Sarah as indicated in the diary later.)*

3

“Brother Dave, “ John said when we found Dave at the workshops, “Brother Mark needs to talk to you. He wants to do his own laundry, and go see the town.” He seemed quite eager to tell Dave this. This guy likes controversy me thinks.

“What’s that? Brother Mark, doing laundry is the women’s work. All of us guys get it done that way. That’s the way it works around here.”

I was somewhat defiant. “Brother Dave, I don’t mean to cause grief, but I do my own laundry. It has always been that way for me. My own mother isn’t allowed to do it.”

“Brother, you won’t have time to do your laundry. You’ll be working too hard.”

“I’ll find some free time I’m sure.”

Dave’s face became stone. I now could see the lines in his face which formed his usual expressions of conceit and control pronounce themselves. His lips looked a little more puffy now, his cheeks a little more drawn down, the lines in his forehead a little more deep. His accent too became very thickened with it’s sharp end tone clip, and he uses them for effect.

“Free time!” he burst out while rocking on his heels, hands thrust into his pockets. Brother, there ain’t no free time. You don’t have no free time. Your time belongs to the Lord. You’re here now. “

Men had now started gathering around to hear us talk. Dave looked around at them side to side, enjoying himself, as a chorus of soft “Amen” rose up. About eight men were not gathered around me.

“You were out there wandering around doing no good to anyone Brother. The Lord has brought you here now to this farm to straighten you out. We do the Will of the Lord in this place, not our own thing. This is not Hotel Texas. You think you were out there in Texas helping Brother Ben, but you were useless to him. You can’t help him, he’s going to Hell. There you were running all over Texas thinking you were saving people, helping their lives. Brother, they’re all going to Hell. But God has brought you here to this farm so that you can be saved and go on to the Kingdom. Everyone here on this farm is going on to Glory. You want to go on to Glory don’t you Brother?”

“Well of course.” I said.

“That’s why God brought you here. This farm is a representation of His Kingdom on earth. And all your time belongs to God. Occupy until He comes. You were useless in Texas. But you think you’re wise. Just like the little foxes right?”

“What do you mean? I’m not useless.”

“You see, you don’t even know your Bible. And you think you can help those doomed fools.” Dave was getting a charge out of making me look foolish to his boys. “Brother...” he pointed to one of the black men.

“The little foxes spoil the vines,” the man said in reference to **Solomon’s Song 2:15**. A chorus of “Truth,” and “Amen” followed.

Though there were new faces around, I was not introduced except that this was how they were seeing me for the first time. Dave continued:

“So you see you did more harm than good. You’re a mess brother. You better get right or you’re going to Hell.”

There is no doubt in me that something is wrong here by this time. I’m not perfect, and possibly I brought all this on, but enough was enough. My first thought was to leave this place immediately, but for some reason, I didn’t. So I continued talking with Dave.

“I was also hoping to see a little of the town while I’m here. It’s far away from home, and I think it would be a good thing.”

“There’s nothing out there for you anymore Brother. What do you want to see? It’s all going to burn anyway,” Dave said.

“You don’t go out and witness to the people there?”

“We’ve done all that. We’ve had our boys all over that town for three years. Not a one of those people are in our church today. We’ve tried and tried until it was obvious it is useless. If they’re not on this farm then they are going to Hell.”

“I wouldn’t say that.” I was shocked. “Coming into town I met a very nice woman who was really searching. She had just turned to Christ after a time in the New Age movement. I told her about the Word of God in the King James Bible too. It did her a lot of good, and I would like to talk with her some more.”

“Oh. Now I know why you want to go to town. A woman. Well she’s going to Hell. You’re carnal Brother. You’ve got to learn to think in the spiritual. Look at these

young brothers around me here. They've given up on the carnal. I know it's hard to not get married and to put the physical needs aside. But these young men, Brother John, Brother Enoch, they've given up the lusts of the flesh for the Kingdom. Some of us are fortunate enough to be married. But Paul said it's better that some be not married. Ain't that right Brother John. I tell you you could work until Jesus comes, and you can't help that girl."

"Why?"

"Was she wearing pants?"

"As part of her job," I said.

"She's a Jezebel. You did her no good at all. But hey, I tell you what. If you want to go to town, go right ahead. It's Friday, we're all done here as far as work goes." Dave was now being very sarcastic. "You go and do the little things you need to do and come back by church time. Get it out of your system. Then come back to stay. If you really need to go. But I don't think you do now, do you?"

I had now to make a decision. If I went to town, I would not come back, and Dave knew that. He's no dummy. I decided to stay because, seeing I am in no physical danger, I am curious to learn a little more about what I've stumbled into. "I've got no need to go." I said.

"Thought so. The evening meal will be served soon. It's time to go get dressed." Dave said. The group split up, and all went their ways.

4

After this very enlightening conversation with Dave and the guys, it was time I find myself alone to think about what I was into. I went to my room to unpack the necessities, and plunked a few tunes on the banjo while thoughts of desperation pressed through my head. At around 14:30, after I was done with my little pouting session, I ventured out toward the middle of camp and noticed the place was deserted. Approaching Fellowship Hall, I could hear the activity inside. "Surely," I thought aloud, "someone would have come and gotten me if it was meal time. Possibly it's an informal thing; come when you're hungry type deal." My thoughts were soon corrected.

Inside for the first time, I saw Fellowship Hall at meal time is a busy place. People were already moving about with their plates gathering food in an orderly fashion. Lost, I walked to the long set of tables where Dave sat at one end, and searched for a place to sit.

"Brother Mark, take off your hat and coat. No no, you can't sit there, move down a few...not there, one more. "

All along the table were little cloth napkins and some drinks already placed. It was a crowded layout and hard to tell which spot was free, if any. It still hadn't dawned on me that mealtime is a structured affair and that all the seats were assigned. Confused, I asked Dave, "What is the procedure? Do people get a drink and put it down where they want to sit, or are all the seats assigned?"

"Well if you had been here on time, you might have known what to do."

"Sorry Brother Dave, how could I know? No one came to tell me what to do." I looked around and watched the actions of the other people. Following their lead, I filled a plate and cup. I had to be shown piece meal by a number of people what to do. To Dave who was observing from afar, I must have looked a klutz. He knew I had been

wronged in the ordeal. I made it back to the crowded table with my stuff. Again that little feeling came over me, as I sat down, that I was not in the right place. People were looking at me funny. I was disrupting the setting order, or some horrible thing, because the kids around me were giving those tell tail looks. Not an adult, man or woman, gave me an approving look.

Instinctively I stood up and scanned the room for another place to sit. Dave was still watching; always watching; what a creep. "I'll move over there," I motioned to Dave toward an empty table on the side. Quickly I made the change and sat with my back toward Dave. At least then I couldn't see him watching me.

The meal was a light one. It consisted of corn bread, muffins, fruit, apple sauce, and potatoes. The food was very good and fresh. When I noticed people going for seconds, I did the same. No one spoke during the supper. I smiled at a few people while in line, but they just barely responded. Boy, what a hostile group, I thought to myself. At the same time though, here I am, a stranger in their little community who Dave, the leader, has seen fit to rail, and by now they all know it. To me it was a totally understandable situation. But I'm sure they'll accept me in time if I am an honorable and upright fellow. Still I wonder how I screwed up so badly already.

After supper I took to watching the women work to clean up the kitchen. Dave had wandered outside for some reason, and I had struck up a conversation with the nice older woman I met earlier - the one who lived next door. She was doing most of the work since she has no husband or child to attend to, so we were somewhat alone. We struck up a little conversation and discovered we are a lot alike. So far she is the nicest person I've met here. I can't remember her name, so for now I'll call her Sarah until I can correct it later. I walked with her around the kitchen helping her lift some heavy things while she showed me the equipment. The kitchen is mostly powered by burning wood. She told me some personal things about how she wound up at the *Overcomer*, and that she and others trade off between working the farm and the Campground (the name given to the property on Highway 15) periodically.

It wasn't long before Dave was back on the scene.

"This kitchen is one place you are not allowed. And I mean that," he gruffed. "I mean, you can look right now, then that's it. If we find you hanging around the kitchen, we'll put an apron on you. The men don't go into the kitchen." While speaking, he straightened up his tone and ended on a light note, trying not to appear too forceful in front of Sarah. With that kind of hint, I left quickly and returned to my room to think once more..

Friday night services are held at the Campground. Since I have done so much writing for today, I'll try to write about tonight's services tomorrow. For now, I'm very tired and need to clear my head. The bed provided is very comfortable. This first day was quite troubling for me.

Good Lord, thank you for getting me this far and keeping me safe. Amen.

Chapter 3

Saturday, December 10.

Last night we went to church from 18:00 until close to 22:00. All the residents of the farm travel to the church in a school bus which is driven by one of the black brothers. Not wanting to be late again, I arrived at the bus early. This gave me the advantage of watching all the people as they entered. The children are quite cheerful and well behaved. I estimate that there are ten to fifteen, half boys and half girls. Dave has a good relationship with all of them. They laugh with and hug him like a big teddy bear. This is in stark contrast to how I have gotten to know him. Yet, Dave does yield a firm hand over them, and if a child gets out of control as children do, he is quick to correct the situation before the child's own parent. Crying is one of the things I see he does not tolerate. I get the impression that Dave more than augments the authority of the children's natural fathers, but that he supersedes it. In a world where parents have forgotten how to parent, this can be seen as an admirable situation, though I would resent such an intrusion. With all of the evils of society and peer pressures to transgress from God's commands that kids on the outside face, these children here have it good. I might approve of raising a young child here had I one, except for one very important thing. As they grow up they will realize that they are living in a closed society where they will never get beyond a position set for them. They will have a hard adjustment to face when they choose to leave this place. I hope their education includes preparation toward that end.. I wonder if the children are told that leaving here is the same as going to hell. My guess is that this teaching is given to the kids since it is one of Stair's strongest admonitions.

When we arrived at the Campground, we joined the residents who live there in the tabernacle for services. In all, there are nearly sixty people in attendance. The tabernacle is a midsize auditorium with rows of metal fold out chairs facing a pulpit area. As in most churches, a curtain hides the back stage area where there may be sound and radio equipment set up. There are some sound system speakers up front facing the chairs. This is a bare bones setup. There are no elaborations present which one might expect in an apostate main- line type church. The minimum has been expended to make the church functional, and comfortable. For as long as Stair preaches, the metal chairs got quite hard, and I noticed many had brought cushions to sit on.

The children know the church procedures. They immediately went to their chairs, and facing away from the pulpit, got on their knees to pray. Their parents also did the same and they buried their faces on their chairs to pray. This reminded me of a Pentecostal or Baptist tradition. Not wanting to appear too different, I followed the cue and did the same. But when it appeared much time was spent in this position, I got up, as I was finished praying quickly. The people stayed on their knees for a long time and began to moan and wail. Some began to speak in tongues and make noises. Some said the same things over and over again like chanting. This went on for close to an hour, and it made me discern something was not right about it. Unhappiness was the tone of their prayers.

Though I heard only one man speaking quietly in a definite foreign tongue, I could hear a multitude of definite fakers. And the fakers were the loudest of all. Others

were chanting what amounted to be “mantras” in a Catholic fashion. The session wound down with tears and crying, and with great emotional expression. Then Ralph Stair came out from the back, and the real show began.

Stair has a definite gift for preaching. He uses that gift to the best of his psychological advantage. At first I found myself enjoying his preaching. He joked and included members of the audience in it. However, Stair’s focus and emotional state change frequently and he soon became verbally abusive to individual members and the group and as a whole.

It appears there was an elderly sister suffering from old age and was on her death bed in another building. Stair spoke of her passing being imminent, but that she was not afraid and needed no medical or physical attention because she was in God’s hands. He made light of her condition in the face of leaving this old wicked world for the Kingdom of Heaven. In one sense, I know it is right to pass in peace without tubes being put all over you to prolong the inevitable. But I didn’t get a good feeling about how Stair was portraying the situation. Any further opinion of mine on this though will be irrelevant, seeing that I don’t know the whole story.

During Stair’s opening comments, he mentioned that he was indeed on the air (over the radio). He came around to mentioning me and my presence as a visitor.

“Brother Mark from San Diego has come to visit with us. He’s here to work, and I want you men to make sure he works.” He went on to tell the group how I first was greeted by him and how he told me to shut up and do as I’m told. “We’re going to see why Mark is here and we’re going to straighten him out.” He exaggerated facts to make his role in the story more authoritative.

Within a half hour, Stair’s focus turned from individuals toward preaching. The congregation listened intently as he went from one topic to another. I could not follow his path of logic through the topics, as he would call out Bible phrases to back up his points. The people listened quietly, which upset Stair. He would often stop and ask if we could hear him and his meaning. The crowd would affirm loudly, but Stair would retort them calling out insults.

“I don’t believe you people. You’re stupid. You can’t even comprehend what I’m saying. Oh if you only had half a brain you could see what I’m saying. You’re knuckle heads.” Still the congregation would affirm with “Amen” and “Truth” calls.

Stair went on and on obnoxiously for three hours. He was going to let another brother do some preaching (Joe Marler), but he got carried away with himself and postponed him until some other time. If anyone has ever heard the broadcast of the tabernacle services on the radio, they can understand my meaning. However, they will be missing half the show, for Stair holds onto a microphone and runs all over the head of the room as he speaks. He holds strange body positions, almost standing on his head at times, as he strains to get a message across. His face and eyes contort in a manner I’d not think possible of an old man. In person, his speech hisses because he has missing teeth needed to aid in forming the words. By the time the night was over, I was overloaded with non-squatter thoughts. I could see that everyone had been worn down, but at the same time praising the “Prophet” and his words. We had a quiet exhausted ride back to the farm arriving back at about 22:30. This is what went on last night in church. This morning we went to church again. I’ll write about that now.

2

I slept good last night. The bed is comfortable, and I was tired from such a trying day. Last night I was thinking things just had to improve, but they didn't.

I was still half asleep when I heard John leave his room at about 7:15. I figured it was a clue that I should be up and moving. Still to this point, the routine of the place had not been explained to me, so I was guessing at everything. When I arrived at Fellowship hall at 7:45, thinking breakfast might be around 8:00, I found I was again late, and a bit underdressed. The people were already dressed for church. I quickly took some food and drink to my place.

The breakfast consisted of some of the same breads and fruits from last night, some hot cereal wheat cereal, and potatoes. The food is very fresh and very good. For the Sabbath meals, the food is prepared on Friday afternoon, and the meals are quick and simple so that the women have minimal work to do.

When I got to my seat, I found a young family I had not yet seen had taken up position at my once lone table. By their actions I knew they were visitors like me. I introduced myself, trying not to interrupt their meal. The husband's name is Doug. He is a well built average size white man, 5'11", near 30 years old, and 190 pounds. He is a gentleman with a gentle way about him, and very attentive to his wife and two young daughters. The wife is a pretty girl with dark long hair, 5'4" and near 28 years old. In her arms, and in a shoulder sling, was their youngest girl of nursing age, and the other daughter is a well behaved 3 years old. They come from the New England/New York area and have the accent to prove it. This is their second visit to see "the Prophet," and they are scheduled to stay until next Sunday. I talked a bit with Doug, telling him about Texas, and about Brother Ben's Christian music tape "Seed Time & Harvest". I offered to bring him one, but he acted closed minded and accepted only halfheartedly. It became apparent to me that he was mesmerized by this place, but that his wife was not happy being here. After breakfast was finished, many women had come by our table to ask to hold the baby.

Other than a few hello's, no one else had yet spoken to me. Not knowing what to do after breakfast was over, I asked Doug if he knew what came next.

"I don't know what comes next Brother Mark. No one has told me yet either. Seems the person to talk to is Brother Dave," Doug said shrugging his shoulders. "I think the bus leaves for church near 10:30 though."

Since, by the looks of things I was under dressed for church, I went back to my place and changed clothes and played some banjo tunes. I heard John come in and go out at 9:45 without saying anything. After a time I got nervous that I might be late for something again, so I left as well and found the bus loading to leave already. "Boy," I thought, "these guys sure are not very nice to visitors. In any other place, you would get some instructions as to times and places. Am I being set up to look like a fool?" Glad I was not late this time.

This morning's services were much the same confusing mass of teachings as last night. Again people were on their knees for a very long time wailing and calling out for Jesus. I am embarrassed as a Christian to be represented this way. The same people were saying the same things in their prayers again and the same fakers were faking the same things again. What is very interesting to watch is the children. Their ways tell another story. In their actions and reactions is the note of confusion. Though adults can

mask their misgivings to fit a part, children can not It shows obvious to me by watching the older kids that they are not comfortable with the mental manipulation they live with.

If it seems that I am drawing quick conclusions upon this group which might seem rash, I am sure that I'm not. I would not infer that anything was wrong here if I was not absolutely sure of it.

Stair preached for a very long time. He commented that last night's long winded sermon had been rough on him, but it had not held him back a bit today. My visiting came up again as he spoke. I had fazed out and was day dreaming, so I was not listening to him at all after a time - just pretending to be attentive - when he made a comment in my direction which brought me back into focus..

He said, "Isn't that right Brother Mark?" as he moved toward me to the end of the microphone cord. "I mean you ought to say Amen to that."

I sat looking at him wishing I had known what he was talking about.

"Amen, Brother Mark! You'd better say amen Brother! Say it!" he shouted.

"Amen!" I responded, knowing that we were on the radio and not wanting to make a scene for the world to hear.

"You know, Brother Mark here says he came from Texas after helping Brother Ben. You didn't help Brother Ben. No no. Ben probably thinks he's a prophet too. You notice how I didn't promote Brother Ben when he first came on the air and you told me about him Mark? I just knew he wasn't going to amount to much. Ben's not a preacher. He doesn't belong on the radio preaching. He's out of his calling and I knew that... didn't I? It's not his calling!

"Brother Mark knows Ralph Epperson and lots of other "important" people. Well, they're nobodies. It was I who first introduced them all on the radio... Gary Kah, Ralph Epperson, John Cohlmann, Rod Lewis, Texe Marrs...they are nothing without me. I was on the air before all of them. Short wave radio was not popular until I started it out. I'm the Last Prophet of God.

"Now I'm sure they are all fine men. Brother Ben too. But there will be a lot of fine men going to hell, which is where I'm sure a lot of them are going. Take Brother Texe for instance. He's not a preacher and he knows it. But he brings a fine teaching. Well, even Texe has problems promoting with that evil "Rapture" doctrine.

"Well, Brother Mark from San Diego is visiting us for a few months. I want to make sure that he works. You hear that Brother Mark? You see, I would like to know that I can depend upon you brothers. Brother Mark, he's here for just a short while. I don't expect much out of him. But he's here to lighten the load for you. It's a hard life, but it's a Godly life. I don't care if Brother Mark ever listens to me again after he leaves here, in fact he probably won't. You hear me Brother Mark. After you leave here you will probably never listen to me again!"

This was all I can remember of what he said, though not exact, it is recorded somewhere. Remember now, Stair moves back and forth and holds strange body postures as he speaks in vehement tones. I got the feeling that the last statement might be a prophetic one.

Stair let up and let the black man Joe Marler, who was postponed from last night, speak. The man opened the Bible and preached a whole sermon on the topic of "questions".

“Questions. Always questions. Why do people always have questions when all they have to do is shut up and listen? The Lord was giving his message on the end times and those apostles had a million questions which the Lord did not always answer. If the men would have listened to His words they would have no questions. Look here where it says **‘And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.’** It was not enough for them to learn from the Lord though, for as we read, **‘Then said one unto him, Lord, be there few that are saved?’** Another question. Always questions.” (ref. Luke 13: 22, 23)

Of course the meaning of the sermon is to follow and not ask questions. When the man was finished, Stair preached for another long time until we were finally let out of services at about 14:30. Just when you thought Stair was about to wind down many times, he would get onto another kick and go again. It was amazing to me he even finished. Completely drained, I went straight to my room when we arrived back at the farm. I kept saying to myself, “I can’t sit through any more of his preaching.” Another side of me keeps saying, “You’ll get used to it. It’s just for a while. You can handle it. There’s no reason to quit yet.” But becoming desensitized to this goings on is what I’m afraid of.

I read my Bible to search out my next move. I decided again to stay. God has me here for some purpose. I was in my room for an hour playing my banjo when I heard a voice calling out for me.

“Brother Mark, Brother Mark. Are you around here?” I was shocked to recognize it as Stair himself.

I got up with banjo in hand and went outside, and from around the corner through the trees appears Stair. “I’m here,” I called.

“There you are. The other brothers and sisters are having fellowship in Fellowship Hall,” he said point that way. “After services we gather there to have a chat and be with each other. Do you know why I came out myself to get you?”

“No. I don’t know anything that goes on here.”

He said, “When the shepherd looses one lamb, he will leave all the others behind to go out and get that one which is lost. You see, your soul is my responsibility now from here on. I can’t do my job if I let you stay lost, so I left all the others just to come get you.”

“I didn’t know you all were there. No one has told me any of the routines. I just like to be alone anyway. The people here are quite rude.”

“Well, I was talking to the folks and looking around and asked, ‘Where’s my Vagabond?’ I said I can’t give an important talk without my Vagabond, so I came looking for you. What was the first thing God said to Adam in the garden?”

“He said it is good,” I said.

“No. He said it is not right for man to be alone. So he made him a helpmeet. Not a helpmate, but a helpmeet. Eve was put there for to help Adam meet his obligation to God, and to provide fellowship. It is not right for you to want to be alone because others will help you meet your obligation to God. So come and join us now; the people are waiting. By the way, are you any good on that thing?”

“No, I just plunk around on it a little. I’ll put it away and join you.”

When I came out Stair continued talking. “You see the trailer you’re in? I got that for free. Most of the stuff around here was given to me for free.”

“Well it is a very nice and comfortable accommodation. I thank you.”

“I’m glad you like it. Doesn’t look like much, but it works.” We walked through the woods toward the Fellowship Hall and Stair pointed things out to me. “You see that camper shell on blocks over there? I lived in that thing for seven years before I married my wife. Really, seven years. You can ask Brother Dave. When he and I came here there was nothing. The Lord has given me all this. I don’t know why he gave me the land and all this. I’m just a lowly preacher. But then he said he was going to raise me up and make a Prophet out of me, and here I am. Who would have guessed a man who was once ready to kill himself could be given so much?”

“Don’t be too hard on judging the men here Mark. They’re good men, and they work hard. They’ll accept you in time, and they’ll give you the shirt off their backs. It’s a hard life here, and some of the single men have it very hard. They work hard to build a Godly place and life. They do as they’re told and are loyal. Now they are not captives or slaves. There’s keys in every car here, so they can leave any time they wish. I’ve even given them the car and put food in it for those who decide to leave. But most know that there’s no other place but here. Where else will they go? This is their home, and accepting new people into it is difficult. You’ll prove yourself in time.”

Stair’s voice was somehow soothing to my troubled mind, and he caused a sense of wanting to belong to well up inside me. In retrospect though, I see he is a master manipulator at work. He’s a skilled manipulator, all the way down to the not so cute little name he put on me.

3

At fellowship Hall, the people were waiting and watching as I came in with Stair. I noticed Mrs. Stair and daughter Naome were present as well. All were assembled in their usual places, Dave at one head of the table, and now Stair sat at the other head. I took my seat with Doug and his family, knowing I was in for another one of Stair’s best shows.

Stair was not tied down by a microphone lead or a radio broadcast this time. It was at this time he let loose with all he has, and it was at this time I had determined that he is shrewd, brilliant, psychotic and narcissistic.

“I was talking to Brother Mark here when he first arrived. I said, ‘I know who you are, you’re a talker.’ He says to me, ‘Gee you sound like you do on the radio.’ And I said, ‘Of course I do. You got the real thing here boy.’ I told him I was wondering where my Vagabond was. And I went and got you too, didn’t I Mark? I told him about the trailer we got free and how I lived in that little shell for seven years. Tell them all Brother Dave. It’s true?”

“Oh yes it’s true, you lived in it for seven years,” Dave said.

“Brother Mark thought he could help out ol’ Ben in Texas. But I knew from the start it was useless. They’re all going to hell because they go against the Word of God. I’ve never listened to one of Ben’s programs. Don’t have to. He’s out of his calling.”

Stair left me alone for a while and got onto many topics and other people’s problems. He talked history with Dave and some of the other men. The chat turned into full on Stair style preaching with supporting calls of “Amen” and “Truth” from the group. Stair was moving all about the room at times, getting in people’s faces, sitting occasionally, and then up again with an unpredictable direction. The people acted as if

they loved it. It was exciting and mesmerizing as he came up with tid-bits of enlightenment and revelation. Cutting others down and bolstering himself was a big theme. He is the “Last Days Prophet of God.” He “cannot be wrong for if it comes out of this mouth, it comes from God. If you’re against the Prophet, you’re against God.”

I looked over at Doug who was glued to Stair and his movements. Doug’s wife was content to tend to her children. Doug was taking copious notes on everything Stair said. On his rounds, this did not escape the attention of Stair.

“And here we have among us the Scribe. Are you getting it all down Scribe?”

Stunned and shaken Doug replied, “I’m just taking it down so I don’t get you wrong when I study.”

“Awe that’s okay Brother, just don’t misquote me now,” Stair said laughing. The others too laughed as Doug replied,

“I would never do that Prophet Stair.”

During a point of quiet, I ventured to ask Doug what the funny brown liquid in his cup was, but he pretended not to hear me.

“Doug,” I whispered.

“Shhhh.”

“I’d like to ask you what that stuff is you are drinking.”

“Shhhh, it’s coffee, now please I’m paying attention to the Prophet.” Doug was hooked. His spiritual discernment was totally overcome with awe. I felt sick.

Now Stair had to bring his time to a climax, and he figured I was just perfect for the job. “I am the Last Days Prophet of God. Now I don’t care if all of you believe that. But it’s true. Some of you here may be not convinced. Take Brother Mark here for example. He’s been awful quiet.”

I felt the rush of attention upon me. I was now stage center.

“I’ll bet he doesn’t believe I’m a prophet! Well how about it Brother Mark. Don’t be afraid... No wait. Don’t answer that yet. You stick around for a few days. Then I’ll ask you again.”

What was this? He stopped just short of my reply. So I said, “Brother Ralph, I don’t think you would want to put me on the spot in front of all your faithful followers any way would you?” This was a probing and risky question, but it had to be asked.

“I would if I was stupid...or crazy maybe. How about that Brother Mark. Do you think I’m insane? Ugh, don’t answer that one either. You know, if I was crazy, it would show. Crazy people have no control and act irrationally.. But an insane person... now he can be very cunning and intelligent and appear sane much of the time, but yet... still insane.” Stair was communicating with me on another level now. The others were too in awe over this insight and the way his voice intoned as he spoke and his index finger danced in the air. I on the other hand knew better, and he knew it. He was aware that I might cause some damage by answering, so he did not press me to do so.

4

After the afternoon fellowship was ended, Stair and his people left with much fanfare back to the Camp Ground. The women quickly prepared the serving table for the evening meal while the men loitered outside with Stair until he left. We again took our seats at the tables inside. Seeing that there was yet another empty table, and being totally disgusted with Doug’s blind worship to Stair, I chose to opt for the new seat by myself.

Dave took his seat at the head of the long table. The people were waiting for permission from Dave to serve themselves. Dave decided to give a long speech before then though, recapping some of the points Stair had made, and adding his own philosophy as well. Finally he asked someone to say the grace and the hungry bunch went for the food.

The food was very much the same as this morning; homemade breads with real butter, potatoes, some mixed vegetable, and things to drink. There was also a big pot of sliced beef in a broth. The food here is very excellent.

Being new without someone to show you anything is tough. Again I made some major blunders due to lack of knowledge. I could tell Dave was keeping a loose eye on me as I wandered about looking for things. I was looking for a napkin, which up until now I had not needed. But there were none to be seen.

“What are you looking for Brother Mark?” Dave called out from his seat..

Again all those eyes were upon me. “A napkin,” I replied.

One of the children got up and ran to a drawer where inside are a bunch of five inch square hemmed cloths. These small pieces of material of various types are the napkins. They are not only small, but unabsorbent. I filled my plate lightly and sat down. A feeling of unworthiness came over me suddenly as I scanned the room looking at the people. Here I was in their community, under their hospitality, eating their food which they worked to gather, and was I stuffing my face for the third time having not yet lifted a finger in work.. I did go up for seconds when I saw others doing so.

Dave too went for a second helping and wound up in line behind me. I took the big fork in the beef pot and stabbed up myself a few slices, but what came up was two more slices out of the dark pot than I had expected. My thoughts went wild. What was I to do? The meat is already on my plate. Should I put some back or not? I got nervous as Dave was quick to respond to what he had observed.

“Well I should say we’re going to have to work you especially hard this week Brother. “

“It is a mistake. I did not mean to take this much.”

“Sure, that’s okay Brother. If you feel you need that much, take it.”

“What would you have me do? It’s not proper to put it back off my plate.”

“Like heck it ain’t. Put some back in the pot boy.”

I was truly embarrassed as I put some of the meat back. As I walked away I heard Dave after me saying, “You’ve got a lot to learn about a community feed. The food belongs to everyone.” As well, this display did not escape public scrutiny.

Well, I braved the scummy bathroom before going to bed tonight. Thank God I brought a pair of shower shoes. I must take the long walk to the clean outhouse beside Fellowship Hall next time in spite of the cold and rain. The one near my room is intolerably filthy.

I’ve had a lot to think about today. Tomorrow I hope there will be some farm work to do. I pray that God will soon show me some sign that I am really supposed to be here. That will ease my mind.

Chapter 4

Sunday, December 11.

Boy was it cold in my room last night. Apparently since the stove is close to both Marc and John, they get a full benefit of any heat the stove puts out. Theoretically heat is supposed to travel in to my room via the space between the top of the wall and the ceiling after, passing by John. The obvious result is though that John gets too warm before my room is properly heated, and he turns the stove down.

I heard John rustle out of bed at about 6:30. Due to the chill, I wasn't so quick to do the same. However, I must not be late for breakfast, and I was excited about getting a start at farm work. At 7:30 I heard a cow bell ringing in the direction of the Fellowship Hall. Funny I had not heard it before. Obviously this was breakfast call. This time I was ready and had arrived on time.

By the looks of the goings on in Fellowship Hall, I could tell that people had already been working hard this morning. The building was warm, the breakfast was already sitting on the serving table, and most people had already gotten to their seats by the time I arrived.

Again I took my seat at a table by myself behind Doug and his family. A hush fell over the group, and Dave, in his perch at the head of the long table, began to speak.

“Well, I'm glad to see that Brother Mark decided to join us on time this morning. It looks as if the rain is going to stay with us all day, but there's plenty of inside work that needs to be done. If we get a break in the rain, we need to worry about getting over to pick up the corn. Brother Enoch, you still have to rotate the stock in the root cellar, and brother John has to finish up the painting in the outhouse. We'll find something to do for everyone, believe me this day won't go to waste.

“We're having a problem around here of people wanting to do their own thing. I want to remind you all that we're here to serve the Lord and do the Lord's work. Like brother Mark. He's indicated that he wants to wash his own laundry. Well, we have an order around here and it has to be that way. I have to keep getting on people about wanting to do your own thing. If I let you all do the things you want to do, nothing would get done. This place would fall apart. That wouldn't be right. I don't think anyone has to be embarrassed about someone else doing their laundry. My laundry is just as dirty as the next man's. We all work hard and I hardly think one man's clothes are different than another's.

“Now I know that you all have interests that you would like to pursue. And if you show a real strong interest in something and bring it to me, we'll see what we can do about it. Take brother John for instance. Now he wanted to learn Ham Radio operation, and we let him do that. I don't know if you all caught it yesterday or not, but Brother Stair opened the door on another thing.. He said if anyone here wants to learn another language for speaking over the radio, that this is okay. Now Brother Kurt took the easy one which is Spanish. But there's all kinds of languages you can learn. I don't know if some of you men are inclined to preach or not, but you can become an interpreter. So there are things you can do. But you can't be doing your own thing. Lets have one of you brothers say the grace.”

Dave picked someone to say the grace, then everyone was released to get their food. After last night and the “meat incident,” I certainly wasn’t going to be the first to jump up to the line. If anything, I wanted to allow as many of the people go before me as possible, especially Dave.

Doug was busy attending to his family, making sure they got their servings. When he had finished that task, he turned to me.

“I haven’t driven you away have I Brother Mark? I didn’t mean to offend you if I did,” Doug said.

“Oh no Doug,” I replied, “you haven’t offended me. If you are feeling at all in that line, believe me you have not. Any offense will have been mine.”

“I didn’t want to get off on the wrong foot with you.”

“You haven’t; please don’t be bothered about it.”

When I got up to get my food, I wound up in line with Sarah across from me. Her face was all smiles as she said hello. She took the time to point out the different items on the serving table for me as we filled our plates. There was hot cereal, home made breads, apples, fried eggs, and real butter. What a spread! She pointed out again for me the drink dispensers. The milk is straight out of the cow, and boy is it good. It was nice to see Sarah’s kind and smiling face. I think somehow she doesn’t belong here.

After everyone had eaten their fill of the delicious meal, the women went about cleaning up the kitchen and tending to the children, and the men gathered in the main entrance (the entrance which is lined with chairs around the wood heater stove leading in from the outside patio) to discuss who was working with who. I was assigned to work with a black man named Enoch, whose task it is to rotate the stock so that the oldest of the goods from the root cellar are used first.

Enoch is an average sized black fellow of 6 feet tall, possibly 190 pounds, and good looking. He is single and about 35 years old. Enoch is quiet and short spoken. He spends a lot of time singing hymns quietly to himself while he works.

The root cellar is not really a cellar. It is a two story building which is kept dark inside. On the first floor are stored potatoes, apples, sweet potatoes, and other vegetables and fruits which keep well in cool dark places. Upstairs is stored the boxes and crates used to keep the food in. Also stored up there are pumpkin squashes. They are kept apart so that they don’t touch each other or other goods. Apparently the pumpkin squash will begin to rot at any contact points with another.

I was quite excited about what I was learning in the root cellar. I am afraid I may have asked too many questions of Enoch, who didn’t seem too excited about divulging the answers. I’m the kind of guy who doesn’t like doing things without knowing the purpose because I work better when I have a picture in my head of the desired result of my efforts. So it comes upon me to fill in the gaps which people leave in that picture by asking questions. When I finally had a good idea of what we were doing, I was basically quiet - for trying to hold a conversation with Enoch was futile. Enoch speaks so little that it seems a pain for him to express himself. I know though by his actions that he is a very smart and conscientious man.

What we were doing was taking potatoes from bottom crates and rotating them to top crates. The potatoes become quite shriveled over time, compared to the potatoes I am used to seeing, so they look like a strange breed. But Enoch said they are just good old

regular potatoes. When I asked about the potatoes, Enoch could hold himself back no longer.

“You know Brother Mark, you sure have a lot of questions.”

I explained to him, “I want to learn as much as possible before I leave. As an example, when you meet a new Christian, and that person wants to learn as much as possible from someone who knows more about God’s Word, what do you suppose he does?”

“Well, he asks a lot of questions I suppose.”

“Would you then have a problem with his doing so?”

“I guess not.”

“I then hope you don’t mind that you are here to answer for me in regards to what we are doing now. This is all very new to me.”

“I suppose you’re right, but it is sometimes better to learn by doing instead of by asking.”

We separated potatoes into three types. Those too old to eat are given to the cattle. Those becoming old are brought to the kitchen. The moldy potatoes are composted. The ones with shelf life left we rotated into new crates. The crates used are very open on all sides so that air can circulate as much as possible around each potato. A rotten potato causes those touching it to rot too. Rotten potatoes are quite awful to look at and touch.

Enoch explained why their root cellar was above ground. The one they had made underground got too damp, and the food rotted too fast. The above ground building stayed much drier, and is better especially for potatoes. He said that the underground one is still used, but for what he did not say.

An apple grower comes by some days and drops off the apples too small to sell in the stores. The *Overcomer* buys them at a good price. We rotated a lot of apples, separating them much like we did the potatoes, and sent a lot off to the kitchen for apple sauce. People would come in occasionally throughout the morning to grab an apple or two to snack on. Here, nothing it seems is going to waste.

As I mentioned, in my room is a speaker, that when plugged in, brings in the 24 hour satellite broadcast of the *Overcomer*. There is a speaker as well in nearly every place - Fellowship Hall which is always on, at the work shops (which is a loud speaker), and there is one in the root cellar too - everywhere. I have not found a place here without the broadcast playing at least in the background. I notice that much of the programming is continuous re-runs. Enoch knew every song and word said, and I could see him mouthing it to himself at times during our work. I too in time could know what was coming next. Because I am suspicious, it does cross my mind that eventually a hypnotic effect is more than likely. Orwell’s book “1984” is fresh in my mind.

2

Lunch time comes at 12:00. It was cold and drizzling rain still. Enoch and I left the root cellar and went into Fellowship Hall where all were gathering. All the kids were there too, and they were excited and happy because lunch, it appears, is treats time. Men were still busy churning apple sauce from the apples Enoch and I pulled out. Lunch consisted of a very light snack of bread, apples and soup.

Dave came in with a bucket of pecans. He announced that he wanted some boys to volunteer to shell them. I joined up with Doug and Marc to process pecan nuts. In this area, pecan trees are all around. There was a whole collection of them to crack and separate, and they are good to nibble on too. We sat at a table cracking nuts and talked.

It was at this time I was able to realize that something is seriously wrong with Marc. Marc is a kind and gentle man. His memory is not fully intact, and neither is his ability to hold a conversation. His thoughts are disjointed, but he does have the ability to find a memory if he concentrates. The only persons I know who displays Marc's symptoms are a friend of mine in San Diego who has cancer in his brain, or one who has had a stroke. I fear that Mark may need some attention which is not being noticed. The people here don't see doctors.

Shelling pecans is slow. Doug and Marc were putting their pecans into one bowl while I chose to put mine into another. I wanted to see how many I could do over them, who kept eating most of their work. Dave came by and didn't let the situation go by unnoticed. "Brother Mark, why do you have your own bowl?"

"Well, in the middle of the pecan halves is a shell wafer that needs to come out as well. I have the ones in this bowl completely shell free while in that bowl there are wafers. We'll have to get the wafers out of that bowl before we give it to the women while my bowl is ready," I explained.

"Brother Mark, you don't have to worry about those shell wafers, hungry men will eat anything. Now you boys understand, those are community nuts. It's not fair if you eat them all while you crack them." Dave spoke to Doug a little bit and left. Just then Wayne came by. He started picking through Marc's and Doug's bowl.

"You guys need to watch out, these few nuts here are rotten." Wayne pulled the small handful out and put it into the shell pile.

"They look fine to me," Marc said.

"Eat one then," Wayne commanded. Marc grabbed some and ate them up. But Wayne picked still more out and put them in the shell bucket. "I think they're rotten." Doug stayed silent until Wayne left. Then Doug retrieved the nuts from the shells and he and Marc ate them up.

Shortly, Wayne returned with his arms full of small bags of corn and potato chips. He had been in town looking through dumpsters behind some stores and found a whole carton of chips. These were a rare treat for the guys, and he passed them around.

Doug said, "Hey thanks, my little girl loves these, I'll save them for her." This gave me an idea. to save my chips and give them to one of the farm kids. I bet they'll like sharing them. They probably don't get any treats like this.

"By the way, " Wayne said, "don't forget to get the little shell out from between the pecan halves. We don't want to bite down on shells. "

"That's what Brother Mark was telling Dave just a minute ago, " Doug said pointing at me. "I have to apologize to you Brother Wayne. I also thought those pecans were good, and when you left, I fished them out and ate them." Doug the visitor was trying a little too hard to be liked in my opinion.

We cracked nuts for quite a while. I was glad when Wayne showed up again and said for us to get some rubber boots on because he needed me and Doug to help the men cut some fallen trees up, and that it was really muddy in the cow pasture where we were going. I didn't bring any rubber boots, but Doug had brought two pairs and offered one

pair to me. I turned my bowl of nuts to the kitchen and while Doug was retrieving the boots, I went and stashed my bag of corn chips in my room. On the way back I crossed paths with one of the young boys, I think his name is Thomas or Troy. He's one of the oldest of the kids here and I like him. I told him that I had something to give him later, but that now I had to work.

The fallen trees were at the end of the farm's main road way out into the left part of the cow fields. There is a thin line of trees there and about five were fallen. Enoch and another guy (named Simon I think) grabbed two chain saws and hooked up a small caged goad trailer to a small red tractor, and while Enoch drove the tractor, Jacob, Doug, Simon and I traipsed along side in the mud out to the trees. We stood watching while Enoch and Simon prepared to start cutting logs

Now I've been using chain saws for a long time, and it appeared to me that Enoch was not thinking about where he was going to start cutting the first fallen tree. Enoch was going to start at the middle of a long log which would collapse around his blade as he cut through it. I did not want to tell him what to do, so I suggested:

"Enoch, you know what I do when ever I have to cut the middle of a log that might bind my blade, I cut a notch to allow the log to move slightly."

Enoch looked at Simon over his shoulder as if to mock at me and Simon returned the gesture. Then he said, "Uh, brother, uh we've been doing this a long time and we know what we're doing. I think we can handle it."

I backed off and watched Enoch wrestle with his blade binding in the log and said not a word. At any rate, the two cut up the wood and we stacked it onto the trailer, moving from tree to tree down the way. Heading back to the shops, the tractor broke a tie rod in the steering, and became undriveable with the trailer load. Simon went and got Wayne who brought out the big tractor to tow the wood back, and Doug and I helped Enoch nurse the little tractor back through the mud to the shops by continuously kicking the front wheels in the right directions.

Dave decided to use the gathered wood to repay a neighbor a favor. So we hooked the trailer to the truck and took it over to the neighbor's house and stacked it around his front porch. The neighbor has some pecan trees along his driveway, so we picked up as many pecans as we could in a short time. Some of the pecans were in his chicken coup, so we went in there and gathered those too. This neighbor's chickens were unnaturally friendly and wanted to be pet. Even the rooster was gentle. The chickens were a different breed than I'm used to seeing. That was a lot of fun messing with the chickens.

By the time we got done, it was dinner time. Dave gave his speech as usual and dinner was good as usual. With quite a bit of day light left, I told Enoch that I was willing to work a little more in the root cellar to finish more rotating. He liked that Idea, and we worked there until near 18:00 Then I went with Enoch to light a fire in the green house heater which is situated in one of the fields behind Fellowship Hall.

3

I had forgotten all about Thomas and the chips, but he didn't forget about me. He found me and as I was returning from the green house and asked for his chips. I asked where he was going to be so I could go get them; and he said at the dairy; I went and got the chips and brought them to the dairy; I found his mother there instead of him.

“Hi, did you see Thomas around?” I asked her.

“What do you want with Troy?” she asked untrustingly.

“I promised him a bag of chips I got from Wayne today. I thought he and the kids he shares them with will enjoy them”

She flung her hand out toward me with a frown, “Give them here.” I understand her protectiveness for her child to a total stranger, but she is very up tight. All she’s probably heard about me is the rumors floating around about Dave’s treatment of me.

“He can have them can’t he? Will you be sure he gets them?”

“Yes, yes,” she returned.

“Thank you ma’am. Good night.” I left thinking what a cold fish she is.

I returned to my room for the night as it was now 19:00 where I started writing my notes. I heard John come in and go out without a word. I don’t trust him, so I’m glad he doesn’t talk to me. God please bring a better tomorrow. I want to do some real farm work. Amen

4

A curious thing just occurred. John broke his silence with me. I am laying on my bed when I hear John come in again about 19:30. Up until now, John has been treating me like the dead. I heard him settle on his bed and he began to speak.

“Brother Mark.”

“What?” asked Marc from his end of the coach.

“No, the other Brother Marc,” John said.

“Yeah,” I said.

“I noticed your Bible. I sat behind you on the bus. What kind of Bible is that?”

“An Authorized King James Version, the same you all use,” I said.

“No, but it looks different.”

“It’s a 1611 reprint. I like it better, typographical errors and all, because the words are spelled phonetically and the punctuation is better than the ones today. It also contains all the books originally published in it. It has the Apocrypha as originally included.

“Oh,” John exclaimed, “is there a chance I can get a look at it?”

“Sure,” I said, and handed it over the wall to him. “It’s essentially the same as you all use. You all do use the King James Bible don’t you?”

“No, I use the New American Standard. Some of us use different bibles.”

“You don’t listen to Stair when he says to use only the King James, and that all the other new bible are not good? He’s made a big point on that!”

“There’s nothing wrong with them.”

“Oh quite to the contrary!” I said. We then held a long discussion about the new bibles and I did convince him, using some of Stair’s own words, that he ought to get into the King James. We made verse comparisons and John had to admit that he had been deceived.

“You know, I really think I have been blessed by reading the Apocrypha. To me, the Word of God would be incomplete without it. Those originally published books were studied by all the early Christians,” I told John.

“Why do you suppose those books were removed. You know, I brought a copy of the Apocrypha with me when I first came here, and I put it in the library. I’ll go get it if

it is still there.” John was really in to learning what I had to say. He returned my bible and ran out to the library, returning a bit later with his copy of the Apocrypha.

“I think I’m the only one here who has even read this,” he said.

As he read to me from his copy, I found the verses to be quite different. “What are you reading? It’s not like mine.”

“Well, It’s the New American Standard Version of the Apocrypha. “

“Oh no, that will not do,” I replied.

So we made more verse comparisons. Satan has attacked the Apocrypha as well. The NAS translations are, in my opinion, blasphemous - which can be used to discredit the original.

“You know John, when I first got this version of the bible, I did not like the fact that the front pages contained charts to keep track of Easter, Sunday services, and a bunch of other Catholic type stuff. The people of that time still kept a lot of Catholic rituals, though the bible teaches against them. My first inclination was to tear out those pages. But I decided not to because it is history. Good or bad, history is truth of where we have come from. So I did not remove the pages.

“I’ll tell you something else. You’ve seen Dave get all over me since I’ve been here. I tell you it has no effect on me. I am not afraid of Dave at all for he’s just a man. I don’t know yet why he’s singling me out, but he can’t shake me. I’m just amazed that he would do this thing.”

John paused and then said, “Then I’d say that you are gifted.”

“John, he’s just a man. Keeping this place together is a big job, and I respect him for that. But you all have something missing here, and that is common respect. Dave’s an autocrat.”

“Maybe it’s his protective mechanism; to keep what’s out there from changing what he’s establishing in here,” John suggested.

“I haven’t come here to try to change anything or take anything from you people; just to learn farming and Christian living. When I leave I’ll take nothing either. Brother Ralph knows I’m here to work and learn. I think it is very nice of you all to put me up so well.”

“Yes, Brother Stair told us that there was nothing to fear from you. We’ve had some people come and do bad things. You know, I’d like to get one of those Bibles like you have. Maybe I’ll ask Brother Stair if I can have one.”

It was at this time the reality that these people have no money of their own struck me. They can not freely buy or sell without permission from someone. “Well, it costs about \$35.00,” I said.

“Oh,” John mumbled disparagingly. That is how our conversation ended.

A sign should probably come from God soon whether I need to be here or not. This is my prayer.

Chapter 5

Monday, December 12.

Cold again last night, but the bed is warm and comfortable.

Something very astounding has happened this morning. I can hardly believe the alacrity to which God works. As usual, Dave waited until everyone was quietly seated at the breakfast tables. He had a few items in front of him which he put at the forefront of his morning briefing. Dave puffed himself up and put on a serious face. He then leaned back in his seat and picked up the objects.

“Yesterday someone found these pages from a library book in a trash can and brought them to my attention. This book had been put back on the shelf with the pages torn from the front. Does anyone have anything to say about this?” Dave demanded. After a pause, “No one?”

Just then, John resoundingly replied, “I know of it.”

“What about it Brother John?” said Dave.

“I tore the pages out of the book,” John admitted.

A hush fell over the Hall. Only the sounds of the *Overcomer Broadcast* broke the silence while Dave leaned forward and cocked his head sideways toward John. His lips closed tightly into a mad grin. Most people were looking down at their hands, but I was amazed at what was unfolding before me. I watched Dave’s movements carefully.

“Why Brother?” Dave gasped.

“I’m sorry, I won’t do it again,” John said quickly trying to end it.

“Why?!”

“Does it matter now? It’s done and I’m sorry about it.” John was definitely showing no fear of Dave in his answers. Dave became more adamant.

“I just want to know what would possess you to make such a decision. We don’t just tear pages out of books around here.” Dave held the book up and turned it around in the air in front of his face. He mentioned the title, but I don’t remember it. “Judging from the title I can see that there are probably things in here that you don’t agree with Brother John. But you don’t just decide to do your own thing and do that. It’s not right. I think the group deserves an explanation. Why?”

“And again I say, it doesn’t matter why. I’ve got nothing to say. I messed up, and I’m sorry,” John said straightly.

Dave scanned the humble group, “From now on when you decide, any of you decide, to act on your own and do something like this, you come and see an elder brother first. This material is put into the library for everyone to read. You may not agree with it, but it has a purpose. Amen Brother John?”

“So be it,” said John quietly.

“Did you hear me?”

“I said so be it.”

“Amen Brother John?!”

“I said so be it, that is what amen means, so be it!” John repeated.

“Now Brother John, you belong here, and as far as I’m concerned this matter has been addressed. So we won’t bring it up again. We’ve got a good sunny day today, so lets make the best of it. Brother John, you say the prayer.”

(I was later to learn that John had torn the book a week before I arrived here. He was going to burn the book and the pages but forgot to. I have received the sign I prayed for. It was the very situation I talked with John about last night)

2

After breakfast Dave sent me and many other guys with Wayne to the grain barn. John was sent on his way to finish his job painting the outhouse located near Fellowship Hall. (Called an outhouse, but really a full sized men and women's shower.) Also, Marc did not come with us. So all the available men went with us. Our task at the grain barn was to move a full sized truck load of corn from the trailer up into the loft. At last, I was going to do some farm work.

We carried the grain elevator, which Mike and Dennis were working on when I first arrived, from the shop to the barn and hung it in the loft. If it had worked, a lot of work would have been saved. But the electric motor which was burned out a few days ago was still burned out today, so we put the elevator aside and unloaded the trailer by hand. It is very hard work because we had to lift large buckets of corn up, and the construction of the barn made for some obstacles. I tried to continuously be in a position where I could work hard and not stand watching. For my size, I'm strong. But I was no match for the strengths of the black men like Dennis, Enoch, Ben or Wayne. Doug is a pretty tough bloke as well, so maintaining a tough position was hard with people always wanting to rotate in.

Getting back to Marc. He has a gentleman's nature, always dresses in nice clothes, and I haven't seen him yet work outside. I'm wondering if all is well with him. He's a healthy size white man near 35 years old, and about 185#. He grows his blond beard and mustache, but his head is bald on top. His face is round and smooth, not the look of a deep thinker or worrier. The mornings are cold, and he likes sipping hot chocolate. He doesn't sit like a normal man when he sips on it while relaxing in a chair. He sits gently with his legs crossed, but not in a feminine manner. He is still quite masculine. Yesterday he shared his recollections with me revealing that he's been here five years or so, but his stories were incomplete as if holding a train of thought is difficult. I am worried that something is amiss with his health that is going undetected. He is somewhat slow, but yet not totally lost.

We finished unloading corn within an hour and the men split up to do their pre-assigned tasks around the farm. I was sent with Dennis, Jacob and Timothy into the forest at the edge of the mobile home camp where a small blue house was being prepared for Ralph Stair and his family is to eventually live. It's a nice little house, but it has no kitchen. It is referred to as the "old house". Mounted atop the house is another loud speaker putting forth *the Overcomer Broadcast* so it will not be missed here either. Our task is to finish trenching from the loop road, where an electrical service box is, to the house, and install a wire. I was glad to be involved with this project, because I have done this work on a grand scale when I worked for my brother-in-law's underground construction business in San Diego. Dennis was in charge of the project and had started it last week, so the trench was close to being complete.

Because I know trenching for electrical, I expected to see the usual things happening and the usual parts on hand. But all the important things were not present, especially the right sized wire and electrical conduit. With the wet climate, these were

obvious necessities. Asking Dennis about what was happening invoked a hostile display of frustration in him.

Dennis is a good sized black man who is married and has a little boy. His family lives in a mobile home by themselves in the middle of the camp. He is near 6' 2" tall, 200#, has a nice round clean shaven face, groomed hair, and beautiful blue eyes. His eyes are his most striking feature. Dennis has formal training in electrical work, which is probably why he was told to do this job. But he was told to do it Dave's way, and not the right way, which frustrates him to no end. Dennis' revealed his distaste for dictatorial rule in a round about way.

"Brother Mark, we're putting in an electrical line to Brother Stair's house. The trench is half done. Too bad you weren't here last week when we dug the first part. It was hard," Dennis said while handing out picks and shovels.

"Where do you have the p. v. c. to put the wire into so we can start laying it out?" I asked looking round about.

"Brother Mark, that stuff ain't going to work around here, all your suggestions and questions. I'm telling you right now that if you want to make it here, you gotta keep quiet and do what you are told. You may know what you're talking about, but Dave don't care. You could be the President, but Dave don't care. I know there's got to be p. v. c. , and I know what else you're thinking. But you ain't supposed to think. And I know that's the wrong kind of wire too. I told him that I went to school for this stuff, and that his way was wrong. Dave wants 30 Amps. through a 25 Amp wire, he wants me to cut a branch splice in it for over there instead of a parallel wire, and it's wrong and dangerous. It's stupid man. But that's it. The Bible says obey them that are over you.

"You know in a splice you get a big drop in your usable amps. He wants 30 Amps. through this with a splice! But Dave is right. He is always right. I tell you this; if it screws up, it won't be on my head, but on him because it's his way. I do as I'm told. So you just keep quiet Brother Mark, and stop bucking against the pricks" (in reference to what Jesus said to Saul). Was Dennis being literal? Giving me all that grief for just a normal question is another eye opener.

These people have sold out to serfdom and are not happy about it. Dennis, an intelligent man, gives up the knowledge given to him by God, to please Dave. And Dave asked Dennis the electrician to do a job, but then tells him he can't do it right. Dennis could have been more adamant with him, but knowing Dave the tyrant, I guess not.

We worked on the trench, listened to the Broadcast, and talked. Dennis is uneasy around me because I have a strong freedom loving spirit. He made it apparent because every time I made a comment, he would turn to Tim and say, "Ha ha did you hear what he said Brother Tim, he said..." mocking me. They got to asking me accusing questions to trap my words, so I just stopped talking for a time.

Tim is a tall strong white fellow with thick dark hair on his face and head. He's 29 years old, 6' 5" and 200#. He doesn't seem to be too smart or learned, but he is a nice guy. He is easily influenced by his good buddy Dennis to poke fun at me. Timothy came here with his brother, but his brother thought this place was evil and left while Tim stayed. His brother it seems wants to do his own thing, and it didn't work well here.

Then Dennis asked, "You know I got a feeling about you Brother Mark. Are you a preacher? You sure you ain't tried preaching somewhere before and got rejected? You think you're a preacher when it's not your calling?"

“You’re doing all the Bible verses and preaching Dennis. I ain’t never preached before to people. Some suggested I should. But you’re right, it may not be my calling,” I responded.

“Are you sure?” Tim asked, “you sound like some sort of a preacher Brother.”

“You’re doing all the story telling and parroting of Brother Stair. Do you ever listen to anyone else anymore but Brother Stair?” I asked.

They gave me a list of the preachers they know but then added, “but when you’ve got the Prophet of God, you don’t need to look no where else.” Dennis and Tim are both taken strong by the bad spirit which lords over this place. In their competition for recognition, the people have set loose a fierce spirit of contention here. It may be what I see exhibited in the women too. I can see I’ll have to watch out for back biting and snitching.

3

In late morning, the men were called from around the farm and gathered at the shops. The *Overcomer* apparently has a deal with some neighboring farms to be able to pick up any corn left after the harvest. Our task was to go across town and get as much of it as possible before the rains rot it while it sits on the ground. The corn is harvested by a combine machine, and a lot is left behind hidden in the flattened stalks and shucks. So we loaded onto the truck and trailer, took fruit and bread for lunch time, and spent the balance of the day gleaning corn.

I found the corn gathering enjoyable and challenging, and also back breaking work. Enjoyable because we were out working the land and in fellowship as men. Challenging because finding the corn in the underbrush is hard. The rains have caused a lot of corn to become buried in wet soil. The corn was already beginning to rot. After an hour of working, I learned tricks in spotting the corn quicker.

The corn is planted in rows, and the men line up at one edge of the field picking an isle with one row to his left and right so that he gleans two rows at once. When the other side of the field is reached, the men choose new isles and work their way back. By this method, a 10 acre field can be covered in good time. The corn is thrown into strategically placed common piles throughout the field for easy pickup. At 14:30 Dave came by with the young boys in a Ford Aerostar-van to pitch in on the effort. We worked the fields until supper time. Glory to God! It’s hard work, and I love it. We’ll probably go back tomorrow for we did not finish the work. I know this, we collected tons of corn for winter cow feed.

Dave worked with us and the boys. He was in a good mood, and for the first time I was thinking he may not be too bad a guy. The kids like him sure enough. By the end of the day, Dennis had become much less antagonistic toward me. And John was excited about our discussion of the Bible and taking time to ask my opinion on the Book of Tobit.

The children here are well cared for and well educated. I really liked working with them and can see how I can get attached to each one. They expressed acceptance of me as well. If all days can be like this one, it will make staying here a lot easier.

Dinner was good. We had home made bread and fresh cooked stew, and well it’s just too much to write about. A hungry man enjoys what he eats. Still though I waited until nearly all had served themselves before I got in line. Dave keeps a close eye on everyone, and he hasn’t yet asked me what I’m waiting for when I delay getting food.

I'm content to leave things as they are. Hey, things might start looking up around here for me!

After dinner, I went with Enoch to the root cellar to do more rotating. It wasn't necessary to work, but I suggested it to him since it was only 17:30. He liked the idea. Another of Enoch's jobs is to keep the school house stocked with wood. At 18:00 the people are supposed to gather there for prayer hour every night. I went with him to help with the wood. I did not stay for their prayer hour afterward. It isn't my style. I came to my room and started writing these notes.

4

There are about a dozen children here, most being black, and half being girls. They are all quite wonderful. I don't know how many toddlers or infants are here. One of the boys has stuck out in my mind as a really nice lad. Troy Thomas is a 10 year old white boy who has a single mother. Some call him Troy, his mother calls him Thomas. His personality is so strong that I'm drawn to him. I like children, and they like me. So I think I'll work on making a friend of Thomas while I'm here. Nearly all the guys have a ski cap to keep the cold off while working in the mornings. Fortunately I thought to buy two before I came. Today Thomas told me that he didn't have one. I gave one of mine to him and I haven't seen him without it yet.

The men and the women here have been truly classed and separated, and except those that are married, interactive contact does not occur. The women are all over 25 years old, and some appear quite old. To look at them is to see that they are tired out and holding up emotionally as best they can. The best looking woman here is Mary. She is a single white mother (so it seems) with an 8 year old boy. She has a nice figure, a soft voice and good personality. Thomas' mother is a stern looking, good sized woman with rarely a smile on her face. Sarah's roommate is an old woman who has a whip cracking personality - positive and on the ball. She is the laundry lady and does the single men's laundry on Wednesdays. The other women are married to the men and for the most part appear submissive. There is no doubt that the people are suffering from restrictive interpersonal contact. The women don't even look at the men short of recognizing their presence. I have seen no friendly exchanges or embraces. One can only imagine the enmity that can build between people who are not allowed to communicate, yet daily slave for each other's needs. Undoubtedly this is where this strong spirit of contention which permeates this place finds its spawning grounds. To coin an engineering term, the strain has gone into the plastic range! The women just work, work, work! I'll bet they're relieved when the Sabbath comes around. And still, they work.

There is a dog who lives here named Face because he has a big face. He's a brown hound-dog with a gimp front leg from being hit by a car. Thomas told me Face used to live at the Camp Ground until he got hurt, and that now he spends his life hobbling from the kitchen at Fellowship Hall to his porch at one of the trailer homes. He's a nice dog, but I can tell his little life is not happy. There are numerous cats which hang around the kitchen too. They are not at all domesticated except that they get fed.

5

John came in at about 19:30 and I heard him settle down on his bed. I was reflection upon the monotony that must exist in his life, and how Dave had practically

decreed that as long as John lived here he would be happy to remain single and in his place. No growth, no expression, no romance, none of this exists for John on the future horizon.

“John, “ I said.

“Yeah.”

“It’s really getting cold in here, do you think you could light the stove?”

“No. It’s not my turn, it’s brother Marc’s turn. “

“And if Marc decides not to light it, what happens?”

“I don’t care. I’ve got the middle room and I’m not cold. If he gets cold, he’ll light it,” John said indignantly.

“It’s right there next to your room. Can you light it so I don’t have to go outside and around to light it?”

“It’s not my turn,” he repeated.

I got my shoes and coat on and went out to my van where I retrieved my little electric heater. I set it up near my bed and turned it on. I was determined not to freeze over John’s petty games with the stove.

After a short while John asked, “Brother Mark, what is that noise?”

“I don’t hear any noise,” I said.

“It’s coming from over there and I do hear it. What is it?”

“Oh...you mean...my heater?” I replied, “Well what about it?”

“I don’t think Brother Dave will approve of that here. We’ll have to talk to him about it,” John threatened.

“Light the fire.”

“It’s not my turn.”

I was getting no where with this jerk. He apparently is in such a need of self expression that he was going to make a point of exercising any latitude that feels he has. I unfortunately understand his situation and know compassion. My room was warm enough now anyway, so I let the topic drop and turned off my heater.

“Hey John,” I said, “have you ever heard God speak to you?”

“Oh... I suppose now you’re going to tell me how God speaks to you so that I can think you’re someone special or something.”

“Forget you then. I was only wanting to talk and compare notes.”

John’s attitude softened. “No... I haven’t heard a voice or anything like that if that’s what you mean. Have you?”

“Nope. Not a voice either. But there was a time I was thinking about all the strife in the world and I prayed that God have mercy upon the innocent people. A very powerful thought overtook me suddenly saying, ‘All have sinned and fallen short; there is no one innocent.’ And then an understanding was given to me I had not had before, and I was amazed.”

“I can see what you mean when you put it that way,” John replied.

“In church, I never liked the type of praying you all do here. You know, getting on the knees for over an hour burring your face in a chair. I can never pray that long, and I could tell the other people were just biding time too. And you know the people who call out in “tongues?” Why do they do that when it sounds forced and fake?”

“I know what you mean.” John sounded more relaxed and even laughed. “It’s not required you do all of that time on your knees; you could stand outside until it is over.

It's kind of Pentecostal. And I know what you're thinking too. It's not scriptural without interpretations. Yeah, it's funny. My last roommate said the same thing."

"What happened to your last roommate?"

"He left. He said the same things you say, but he was here for three years. He met one of the sisters here and they left together."

"I had heard about this from a friend of mine, Dave, who lives in Clifton, New Jersey. It caused quite a ruckus here, right?" I asked "There is something that bothers me about the way you are told to live here when I contrast it with the way Stair conducts his radio ministry. Stair tells you that you have to be totally separate from the establishment money system and live in a closed Christian community. And you are told by Dave and Stair that there is no one left out there worth saving, and therefore you need not proselytize the town's people. Yet Stair has a world wide radio ministry proselytizing as many as he can, and he uses the establishment's system to support this farm. He runs a 501 C-3 tax exempt corporation, and yet you are not even allowed to go into town with a dollar in your hand. Don't you think this is hypocrisy in the highest form?"

"No I don't see it that way," John said.

"It is worth a thought John. " Still not satisfied that I was finished pushing the envelope with John, I presented still another concept to him. I wanted to know just how restricted this little society is. "Do you know the woman in the coach next door to us - not the laundry lady, but the other old lady?"

"Oh, you mean sister Sarah?"

"I find that she is so friendly. She is the only one who seems to have a personality of all the women here. I've often thought she was in need of a hug because she works so hard. There's not enough cheer and love to go around here. What do you suppose would be the reaction to such a friendly expression if I did it in full view of the group?"

John was resolute in his response. "That is not allowed here. You would cause quite a scene and be punished."

"Still, it is a proper thing to do. I'll consider your admonition before I do such a thing though. I'm just the guy who's brave enough to do it."

"It's your neck. Do what you want," he said.

My next words may have gone too far for John. "I have imagined myself living here. It would be so easy to be taken care of. Everything here is just provided - work, possessions, church etc.. But freedom; that does not exist here. The freedom of thought is even suppressed. Isn't the reason for being here to escape the New World Order? What of those who are witnessing and dying horrible deaths for the Name of Christ while I would sit here care free? That would always be on my mind after a time. There's too much work to do out there. How do you stay in touch with the world out there? Can you say that after a long time out of touch in here that you can survive out there?"

"I think there would be no problem for me. But I can see the others having great difficulty," John said.

"Have you been on the farm the whole time you've been here?"

"Pretty much. "

"A lot has happened in four years that you may not be prepared for. Rents have sky rocketed and wages are down. Work is hard to find for anyone now. If it was 1986 I

might be inclined to believe you, but 1994 is a different world. In just these eight years the government controls on personal income and liberty have become unbearable. If you have to go back into the main stream, you're in for a shocker. What happens if this place falls apart? Will Stair guarantee you all a smooth transition back?"

"Brother Stair won't just turn us out without helping us. He helped people who've left us before!"

It was time to leave John alone. I may have frightened him with such stark truth after his so long being here. My hope is to make him rethink where he is. At that I said good night to John, knowing all very well that everything I spoke would in some way reach Dave's ears before the end of the day tomorrow!

God be praised, Amen.

Chapter 6

Tuesday, Dec. 13.

Again, breakfast was a welcome thing. Picking up corn yesterday was hard work on the guys, and I thank God that I had no physical exhaustion. Because of the work I've been doing throughout my life, I've had no trouble keeping up. I just wish I was as physically strong as the black men are.

After Dave gave his usual morning blurb, he called attention to Jacob, the Canadian. "Jacob brought something to my attention this morning," he began, "which I would like him to ask everyone."

Jacob is a quiet and reserved sort of guy and seemed apprehensive about this sudden spotlight. "It...it's my coat. I can't find my yellow coat. I left it at the old house on the big rock, and it's gone now. "

"Does anyone know about what happened to Jacob's jacket?" Dave asked while scanning accusing eyes over the "close knit" group. "Let's all keep an eye open for it. Brother Jacob I'm sure it's around here somewhere.

"We're going to have a nice clear day for once, and a lot of work to do. Brother Wayne, we need to get that other side of beef prepared today, and we need to get the rest of that corn... Yes Brother Mark, what is it?"

Hearing that they were going to prepare raw meat, I could not resist in raising my hand. I am here to learn. "Are you speaking of slaughtering a cow?"

"Why do you need to know that?"

"I would like to come and watch the process."

"Brother Mark, I might have invited you along. But there you go again wanting to do your own thing. Since you raised your hand and asked, therefore I'm not going to ask you along. You just wait your time. You'll get there Brother Mark. In answer to your question, no it's already done. You saw the women freezer bagging of the first half yesterday." Dave finished his work orders and we ate.

The food here is quite good, and one gets the impression that it is all natural. So it is with great surprise that I found the next thing out. I was filling up a cup with hot chocolate, and Marc came up to chat. He as usual was well dressed for a day of leisure. Just what does he do here to work?

"Don't drink too much of that stuff if you're not used to it. It's full of Nutra-Sweet," Marc warned.

"What?! Don't you all know that Nutra-Sweet is poison?" I exclaimed setting the cup aside.

"Everyone who comes here thinks we use natural sugar. And everyone tells us the same thing. But Dave and Wayne won't hear it."

"But," I said, "the children are drinking it in like fish. I assume it's in the punch too then."

"Yep, but I wouldn't bring it up if I were you. I just thought you needed to know. " There was for once some clarity in Marc's usually fuzzy conversation. He caught my intentions right off. "If you think you're going to bring the news to Wayne or Dave, forget it. Everyone knows, but it is a sensitive topic around here."

I have a conspiratorial mind, and my first thought is that someone is trying to hurt these people. I resolved to find Wayne and tell him what I know. I found Wayne and took him aside and explained my concerns.

“Brother Mark,” Wayne replied, “we know that the stuff is not good for us. But consider that some sugars are processed using pig intestines. Pigs are unclean in the eyes of God. So we don’t want to use sugar.”

“Wayne, it’s poison. You could be slowly damaging those kids. You don’t substitute poison for sugar because a pig may have been involved in the processing of it. If you know a danger, and you ignore it, you are tempting God.”

“Brother Mark, do you believe the Bible where it says the poisons won’t hurt us?” asked Wayne.

“Of course, in the proper context. But do not tempt God,” I reasoned.

“Then that’s it. Nutra-Sweet cannot hurt us. We got a whole bunch of the stuff donated to us free. We’re not going to waste it. We are drinking it on faith brother. It can’t hurt us! We plead the Blood of Jesus over it. Do not talk about this to anyone here any more. That’s it. The topic has been deemed off limits.”

2

We gathered on the outside patio and after the post breakfast meeting, we received our work assignments and groups off. It was a sunny brisk morning and I was looking forward to the work to start. Dennis, Tim, Jacob and I returned to the electrical trench at the old house. It was almost finished, but some hard digging was still necessary.

Jacob and I arrived at the trench before Tim and Dennis. Jacob went straight to the big rock. He emerged wearing his yellow coat, the one he thought was missing. This I did not notice as he walked over to me. “Tell the others that I’ll be back in a few minutes,” he said.

“Okay,” I said as I began to work. I didn’t think much of his leaving. Tim and Dennis came along and started digging. Finding Jacob not there, they began to scoff and defame him.

Dennis said, “I wonder where Jacob is? He should be here working.”

Tim said, “Yea he sure sucked down the food at breakfast. Maybe I ought to go get his butt down here.”

“Oh,” I interrupted, “I forgot he said he’ll be along in a few minutes.”

Tim said, “He’s off doing his own thing most likely. This is God’s time, not his own. Bible says if you don’t work, you don’t eat. He shouldn’t of eaten breakfast if he isn’t gonna work.”

“Go find him Tim,” demanded Dennis. (It is assumable that Dennis is over Tim by viewing their relationship.) When Timothy returned, he gave his report.

“I went to his house and looked in the window. He was on the bed. Shall I go tell Dave?” asked Tim.

“Let him be. You don’t know what’s on his mind. Why run to Dave for everything?” I said in disgust.

Dennis continued. “Because there he is doing his own thing. I thought so. What a lazy bum. I knew he was no good. If Dave was here, you’d see him out of the bed and in the trench real quick.”

They railed against Jacob for a long time. I decided it was time to say something in his defense because I was getting sick of it. “Hey you guys, listen to you two. Jacob is your friend. How do you know what Jacob is doing. Maybe he needs some time to be alone. You have no Idea what is on his mind. Let him be. Maybe he’s grieving for something.”

“Let him grieve in the trench. This is not his time, it’s God’s. Do you think that in the Kingdom he’ll be able to be alone and disappear when God has required him to do a job? No.” Dennis was now preaching the doctrines drilled into him by Dave and Wayne and Ralph Stair. It is a sick logic.

Just then Jacob appeared and walked up to Dennis. He had been grieving. It was now I realized he had his coat. He made an announcement. “I have an apology to give to you men. I found my coat where I left it, only last night it was to dark to find. I am ashamed for I have accused you of stealing it from me. That is why I am late to work.” He gave Dennis and Tim an embrace, who were now stepping all over themselves to give Jacob praises.

I caught sight of Jacob’s face. I felt a great compassion for him suddenly and I went to him and slapped his shoulder. It was a sort of silent understanding I expressed. Why did I feel compassion? Because, who would steal someone’s coat in small community. Obviously it would be immediately recognized as Jacob’s. It’s more than that. These people have nothing. Their identities are even merged. So they cherish every little scrap of identity they can claim It is more than just a coat, it was part of Jacob. Possibly his own mother bought it for him, or possibly it reminds him of his home. Who could tell. All he would have to do is ask Ralph for a new one and he’d get it, but in here it would not be the same. Jacob has been here for ten months.

Dennis and Tim were full of contention over the incident. I was now on the hit list again, but I was right with God.

At break time I went to the Fellowship Hall and found Marc sitting on some steps. *He was drinking hot chocolate.* He had a blank stare on his face until I addressed him. “Hi brother Marc.”

“Hi brother Mark, kind of cold.” he said.

“Hot chocolate?!” I asked kindly.

“Faith brother. On faith,” he said dully.

Again I was overcome with compassion. “You know... with you my friend, I can believe it to be true.” Marc makes me think about faith in a unique way. Anyway, nothing goes unheard around here.

3

I left Marc and went inside. There working by herself was my lady friend again. She was hurrying around with pots and pans in the kitchen fixing the lunch for the children who would soon come out of the school house. Though busy, she stopped and commented to me.

“I know what you are thinking”

“And what would that be?” I asked.

“You’re looking at all this aluminum and Teflon coated cook ware and think we should get rid of it.”

“Not quite,” I replied, “but you know what track I think on. I had no idea that seemingly educated people would go against good knowledge and do that which is contrary to their best interests.”

“I’ve been very patient with these people,” she said, “and I’m trying in my way to slowly tell them about things they are taking for granted.”

“Well with the types of vegetables you cook in those pots, potatoes, tomatoes, rhubarb, etc., that aluminum is very dangerous. I learned about that in a book called ‘Back To Eden’ by Jethro Klouss. I talked to Wayne about the Nutra-Sweet this morning,” I said.

“I heard. I don’t go near the stuff. I’ve also read ‘Back to Eden.’ Listen Mark. I know how they’ve treated you here. But these are good people. You have to believe that. Go slow with them,” she pleaded.

“What happened to the love and respect that normal people are supposed to have for each other? I don’t see it here.”

“There’s love,” she said, “but not the love I guess you’d expect from Christians. Maybe they’re afraid of the outside influences which could hurt them. Well, I’ve got to stay on schedule.” She turned and hurried back to her arduous work.

The kids rushed in promptly at 12:00 for their lunch treats. Dave showed up too and lined all the kids up in front of the table. The other men were coming in from the fields and watched as Dave had the little procession stand absolutely quiet. If there was any crying or bickering, Dave made them start the quiet line drill all over again until they were quiet for at least ten seconds.

I didn’t quite know what to think of the event. But I was curious to what Sarah had put out for the kids, so I stretched my neck over to take a look in one of the bowls. Dave was sure that I was going to take something before the designated time and lashed out at me.

“Brother Mark, get back from there. You’ll get some, you just wait.”

“Oh sorry, just curious,” I assured him.

“Oh yea sure, you just get back now. You’ll get your turn.”

The exchange was quite petty and designed to further defame me, which I don’t care about anyway. The kids were finally quiet enough to say their grace, and then they attacked the snack with a vengeance. And no wonder, it was caramel popcorn - the Nutra-Sweet treat. Needless to say, I passed.

4

After lunch, we went back to the corn fields to glean more corn. Dave was a little upset with us and called us lazy for leaving so much corn on the field. He admonished us to be more diligent in getting all the corn we see. I like going to the corn fields because I get to see some of the town of Waltherboro along the way. This is the only chance some of these boys get to leave the farm.

Before we got under way, we lingered a bit around the vehicles waiting for Wayne and Simon to put gas in the truck. They store a lot of gasoline in drums next to where the cars are parked. I went and grabbed from my room the rubber boots Doug had loaned me, and was walking toward Dennis and Tim who were waiting to ask me some inquisitive questions.

Dennis started. "Brother Mark, let me ask you what do you feel about discipline of children."

"I don't have any children, so my opinion is just an opinion. I have a four year old nephew called Christopher though."

"The Bible says spare the rod, spoil the child. Do you believe that?" Dennis asked.

"Of course. Each child is a different person. What is rod to one may be damage to another," I said.

"But you would spank a kid to keep him in line?" he continued.

"Probably, if the kid's constitution was strong enough and he deserved it."

"That's not what it says," jumped in Tim anxiously. "You don't know your Bible. Spare the rod, spoil the child. Raise a child in the way he should go..." They were obviously planning to set me up, and I saw it. Timothy became contentious, but I held my peace.

"Each child is different," I said looking at Dennis, "because the punishment must fit the character of the child. "

Dennis wasn't satisfied. "Did you hear what he said Tim. He... (this)... and he... (that)..."

I shut him down by saying, "Stop doing that Dennis, you're smarter than that. It makes you look foolish to me." The two were acting like little kids. I saw a change come over Dennis that moment, but Tim didn't get the hint and I was getting tired of this little game.

"Tim you'd better check that contentious spirit. It's of the devil, and it stinks," I warned.

"I'm not being contentious, you're just wrong," Tim said.

"I'm not wrong - you've got a contentious spirit, and it will destroy this whole place. I rebuke you!" I shouted. Tim was shocked. He stiffened up and turned, and walked away without another word.

Dennis was startled as well. "You can't rebuke him. Who are you?"

"I can, and I did. You know I am right about the spirit of contention here. Someone must fight it."

"Tell me more on what you think about disciplining kids." Somehow, Dennis was changed. But I had nothing more to say. We loaded onto the truck and went to the corn fields.

After a time working the fields, Timothy approached me. "Brother Mark, I must apologize. I was being contentious with you back there, and I want you to forgive me. I'm sorry."

"It is already forgotten Timothy," I said, and shook his hand. A great relief was broadcast on his face. I again was filled with compassion. (God is so great. He is giving me more strength than I have ever displayed in myself before. Just why am I here?)

Dave came out again with the kids at 14:30 to help us pick up corn. I like working with the kids, but I need to be careful with myself. I like kids a lot and get very attached to them and their little personalities. It is easy to want to be involved with their welfare because they are so trusting of adults. It is part of that parental instinct which kick up in young men. I notice that the other young men here can't just shut that off either. They too display a need to have the kids around.

The kids arrived with Dave in the Ford Aerostar-van. As we were leaving the corn fields for the day, I commented on how nice the van is. Enoch told me that it is the Lord's van, and that He had provided it for the farm.

Dinner was good tonight. Hungry men appreciate a good meal, and will eat just about anything. The food is nearly the same thing every night, but prepared differently. My friend Juliet in San Diego would really like the hot peppers they grow here. I must remember to get some seed for her. I also wish I could get the milk back home like they serve here - fresh and unpasteurized, and plenty of it.

Wayne knew I wanted to see the dairy cows. I had asked him if I could go there with him during milking time and help out. After dinner he found me and called me along. I was surprised to see that the cows were milked by an automatic milking machine. I had assumed they would be milked by hand. Of course, Dave had to tag along. He was not going to miss one thing I did while here on "his" farm. It didn't make for a very relaxed learning experience. Dave is the pill that spoils the pot.

Immediately Dave took over what was happening at the dairy. It was show off time for the big guy. The cows were eagerly awaiting to get into the stalls, and Dave was ordering the cows around like a conductor. Wayne stood off and watched too. Then he got bored and went out into the muddy corrals to push cows around. The cows knew the routine, and voiced their discontent about having to wait their turns. I kept thinking what big dogs they are in their emotions. They seem quite intelligent.

Even though I don't like Dave, I try to act cheerful and nice to him always. Even when he's quite bad. So I asked him some questions while I watched. He was more than happy to answer my questions until Wayne came back into ear shot. Then his tune changed back to rotten old Dave.

I asked why his cows are so bone skinny. They look starved with their skeletons showing through their skins.. Dave said skinny cows give better milk. He told me the different breeds and pointed them out. Everything in the Dairy is kept very clean. The floor is washed every time the cows are finished milking. The cows udders too are washed before and after each milking. If cows are not milked on time, it causes them great pain.

Each stall of which there are two, is made to fit one cow. At the head of the stall is a trough full of grain, and the cow's is locked over the trough by boards which are levered about the neck. Since the cow's skull is wider than the neck, the cow can not back out if she wanted to. But seeing that she is kept so hungry, once her head is in the trough, she has to be chased out.

When Wayne was in ear shot, Dave could not resist giving me the a hassle. "Brother Mark, you really don't know anything about cows do you?" he mocked. "You are asking a lot of questions when most times you can learn more just by watching and being quiet." Exactly what Enoch said. I find no fault with his last statement. However, I know my time is short here and I am here to suck up all the knowledge I can. My personality also dictates that I try to learn as fast as possible, and questioning is all I know for accomplishing it. I was right next to those huge happy beautiful cows, and I could hardly contain my excitement. Some might think it strange I could be so fond of animals, but I am.

I watched Wayne and took a cue from him. He was patting and talking to the cows, so I thought it was fine for me to do some of the same. I scratched them where I

thought they would like it, and watched for reaction. Wayne didn't say anything, so I assumed it was okay. But Dave could not let me enjoy myself. Dave's personality is quite dynamic and can change unpredictably. He opened up on me again.

"Brother Mark, that cow doesn't know you, and you're gonna make her nervous. Come away from her," he said. "Now just stay out of the way and don't go near any cows, and you can stay and watch, okay?"

Having seen and heard all I wanted at the dairy by this time anyway, I decided there wasn't enough room for me and Dave in one place; I watched for a few more minutes for appearances sake, then I left. It was around 18:30. Possibly tomorrow Dave won't be at the dairy so I can help Wayne some more. I thank God for the ability to see and learn what I did today.

I found Enoch and again we went together to light the fire at the school house for the prayer hour. (I still don't participate in prayer hour with them.) Getting to know Enoch, I can tell he has a memory for Bible scripture. I feel he could do a lot better with his spiritual health if he didn't parrot everything that is taught here by Dave and Ralph Stair. I know he is not entirely happy. He spends a lot of time singing low to himself in self reflection with his eye lids half closed.

Oh and I can't forget to write, I fed corn cobs to the cows by hand today when we returned from the corn fields in town. They are such peaceful animals.

I didn't do any talking to John tonight. I'm sure he has found a grudge to hold against me. He doesn't say a word to me any more. I kind of like it that way though. He's a fishy character, and I don't trust him a bit.

Thank you Lord Jesus for this day. Amen.

Chapter 7

Wednesday, Dec. 14

God has brought the end to another day. The end to this one came none too soon. Yesterday I expressed an interest in the morning cattle feeding, so Wayne came by at 5:30 to get me. It was so cold in my room last night, I hardly got sleep. I declined going with Wayne and stayed in bed until 6:45. I had gotten up and lit the fire, but John or Marc threw the boards out when they were warm enough.

Before I write about the day, it is important to express what I learned about the social set up here. Ralph Stair is the leader who considers himself “the Last Days’ Prophet of God,” “next to God,” and “is never wrong.” “Anyone who does anything concerning Christianity in the South has to answer to the Prophet first.” He “thinks with the mind of God.” These are his words and are repeated by everyone living here. If anyone here denies it, they are purged.

Dave is the number two man. He runs the farm, it is “his farm.” He considers himself “next to the Prophet,” and if he’s “wrong, then the Prophet is wrong which makes God is wrong, and that can’t be, “ so Dave is “never wrong” either. In fact, Dave says he is “equal to the Prophet.”

The “older brothers” in control are Wayne, Simon, Curt, Enoch, and quietly, Ben. Wayne is the big dog on the block. They are all black men except Curt who works at the camp ground with Stair. Ben seldom speaks out if at all, but he is left alone. These men are afforded great autonomy to travel about, and rule over the “lesser brothers” who seldom get to see the outside of this community structure. Enoch seems to be the least of the “older brother group.” Except for Wayne and perhaps Ben, they all bend to Dave’s beckon call. Dave’s relationship to Stair is subservient when the people see them together. These men have proven to be totally devoted to the farm and are trusted widely. I know Ben is married with children, Dave is married, Wayne, and Enoch are single. I’m not sure about Simon’s marital status.

The lesser brothers include Michael, Dennis, Timothy, Jacob, John, Marc, and Greg. Until today, I have had little exposure to Greg. More about him later. Dennis is the only black man in this group, and he and Michael are the greater of the lessors. Dennis puts up with a lot from Dave while Michael is mostly left alone. Dennis and Michael are both married with children. These two are allowed to drive into town on errands, which Dennis considers a great privilege. The “younger” unmarried men are forbidden friendship contact with women, even those who live here at the farm.

Ben is a big quiet distinguished good looking black man about 45 years old. He never says a word to except hello, and I think he’s comfortable where he’s at. It’s hard to tell what he really has on his mind about the big picture.

My exposure to the way Wayne and Simon work together was more pronounced today. Here is the type of man Simon is. Simon is a short compact black man about 155# and 32 years old, 5’ 8” tall. Simon is also called Timothy, in fact three people are called Timothy here which includes one of the children. Simon is energetic and quick, has a strong smooth likable intelligent personality, yet he is quick to parrot the beliefs of the group, and puts his whole self into serving it. His type requires some leadership responsibilities to remain loyal. If he was a lesser, he would not tolerate it.

There are other men living at the camp ground that I am not aware of.

The women have wound up in a sad lot. They work from early in the morning until late at night. Theirs is the job to tend to the children, keep the food prepared and properly stored, do the washing and sewing, make soap etc. for everyone on the farm. They in essence attend to every need of the men and the farm, but unless they are married to a man, they can have no friendship with the men. I was an exception, and in my short time here, I've tried to talk to the women. I didn't learn many of their names to remember, but here's what I found out.

Ralph Stair's wife is the big hen in the coup. All the women do as she commands, *and the men too*. The women are extremely uptight. Thomas's mother is down right combative, but she is a good mother. She takes charge of the dairy in some mornings and some evenings, possibly all, except when Dave wants to show off to people like me. Mary has a child, possibly married, is the better looking of all the women on the farm. She is quiet as she works. The old laundry lady has a firm personality and speaks to the men in a business like fashion. She commands the lesser men to some extent when it crosses her duties. Sarah is the only woman who made an effort to express herself to me. All the others, about five, are black women and wanted nothing to do with me.

Doug and his wife are visitors and I spoke with both of them often at meal times. There is no restriction on me talking to Doug's wife, but to all resident women, there is a clear discouragement of friendship.

The children are the pride of the farm. They are well fed, well disciplined, well clothed, well taught, and very loved. The little girls are not as well off as the little boys who get exposure to both male and female bonding within the group. Dave takes to playing first parent to all the kids. They like Dave, which is probably a point in his favor. The kids range in age from infant to over 11, Thomas being apparently the oldest. There are near 10 kids in all on the farm. The men get no exposure to speak of with the girls except that it is their own child.

2

Dave gave his usual speech this morning and laid out the plans for the day. His deep white southern accent which he tries to make sound black coupled with his personality makes him appear a fictional character from the funny pages. It's hard not to accuse him of putting it on to make himself feel like the big boss man and good old boy rolled into one. His job has many responsibilities and requires leadership ability, but he treats these grown people like untrustworthy children. Dave has little true respect for these people, and I dare say that they have not a healthy respect for him. I am more aware of the descending undertones which fill these people's hearts. But they remain.

By this time, having watched him and heard the way he treats others, I have no respect for Dave's person at all. I am insulted for these people though they don't help themselves. I know that no one is perfect or totally likable. This guy has rubbed me the wrong way from day one, and I have been totally respectful in my actions. Dave is given over to an evil spirit, and that evil spirit breeds here like do the stray cats. Everyone here is visited by it, and I believe they all nurture, feed and support it. Its name is *Contention*.

After breakfast most of the men went to the corn bin at the grain barns to unload the trailer of corn we loaded yesterday. Again they tried the grain elevator, and again it did not work because of the dead motor. By hand, it is a hard job that will make a man

out of you. While working, the men are enthusiastic and constantly vie for the busiest positions. No one wants to be left looking like a slacker.

On our travels to and from town, Dave spotted some fallen trees on the side of the road. It was his intention to go cut up and remove those trees for fire wood before anyone else could. But rain was promising to fall, so he postponed getting it until later. This left us with nothing to do after the trailer was empty. We gathered at the shops for assignments. It seems everyone has his usual chores, and they were sent their way.

I was sent with John and Greg to clean the chicken coups. The chicken coups are located straight across the main driveway west from the Fellowship Hall. For the first time since my arrival, Greg was helping out this morning. He usually attends electronics trade school week days, and only eats dinner at the farm, but today was a day off of school. Greg is a quiet white man about 30, slightly over weight at 190#, 5' 11" tall, has sandy brown hair and wears wire rimmed glasses. How long he's been here I don't know. I like Greg.

3

Chicken keeping is new to me, but John was quite obstinate about revealing the "secrets of the trade" and refused to answer any questions. He was hostile and rude. To Greg though, he was nice. The chicken coup is John's responsibility I suppose, and I was intruding on his identity. I tried very hard not to get mad at John, but he pushed my patience and I lost my cool.

"John, I don't know why you're being a jerk, but I'm telling you now to knock it off," I warned.

"What?" he said, "I can't hear you."

"I said you're not being too nice."

"Gosh, what's that noise, I can't hear you. You're so far away sounding."

"Now you're being a total loser. Don't pull my chain. You can't," I said.

"Can't hear you, the chickens are so loud, and you're so far away now," John repeated. By his third round, I was no longer enraged against him. I came very close to clocking him a good one, and then I just felt badly for him. John is a typical educated loser who has found his way here to be coddled. He never grew up. He's a "runner" and a "snitch," totally untrustworthy on an interpersonal level. Too bad. I knew it of him from the start. I refuse to hold a grudge against sick people, and I let the matter go.

The chickens are great to be around. Some are as friendly as pets and love attention. Chicken behavior is curious to note. They stand in a spot and scratch the ground, then they back up and pick the ground where they've scratched. They do it over and over, and it's funny to watch. Chickens are smart too. Those little bird brains know when they're in a cage, and all they want is to get out. They wait and plot for the slightest chance to escape, but when they get out, they don't go anywhere.

The birds are rotated from one stall to another giving a chance for the ground to dry out from their dung. The vacated stall is scraped of its top soil which is used for winter soil fertilizer. By the time summer comes, the chicken dung is well worked into the farm's soil.

Chickens need a lot of calcium intake to produce strong eggs. For this reason, their empty egg shells are first cooked and then crushed and spread lightly about the coup. If uncooked shells are used, the chickens might take to eating their eggs.

The weather was still threatening rain when I finished helping John and Greg with the chickens. With nothing assigned to do, I found Dave in the back field at the end of the main driveway attempting to herd the fifteen or so cattle into the far back field. With all the cattle hoof prints holding puddles of water, it is a very muddy place and hard to navigate. The cattle were not cooperating, and I offered to help. Together we accomplished moving the cattle back. A new young heifer bull was delivered yesterday to the herd to strengthen the breed.

It was mid morning now and the men gathered at the shops to receive more assignments. The weather kept us on the farm. Dave set Tim and Jacob to task grinding grain at the grain grinder. In the grain barn is stored many 55 gallon drums of corn, wheat, oats and other grains. I was sent with them to help.

Dennis was walking in the same direction and walked with me part of the way. He pulled me aside to tell me something. As we got near the grain barn on the left, Dennis pointed to something on the right.

“Do you see that block house over there Brother Mark?” he asked. “A lot of this stuff you see around here we get donated to us. A brother came here to visit us last summer and donated all the blocks and labor and built it there for us.”

“That’s nice,” I said.

“Yeah it took him a long time to build. Then when he got done, he got real mad at us and left in a huff. He thought that since he did us a favor that he could try to stay here and do his own thing. He wouldn’t submit to his proper position, so it wasn’t easy for him here. There comes Dave, gotta scoot,” Dennis said, and off he went.

The block house is a good sized one. Funny the man left after it was finished. Did he get better treatment while he had something to offer than when he had finished his charity work?

4

The grain grinding machine is a strange setup. It is located on the right of the main drive just opposite the grain bins. Normally it would be operated by its own motor, but this grinder hasn’t one. Apparently they found a broken grinder and found a way to make it work. Here’s what they did. The main drive pulley of the grinder is exposed where a truck wheel and tire ride against it. The wheel is mounted to an old truck rear axle which itself is lashed to the ground.

The power for the grinder comes from a tractor which is backed up to the wheel and axle where the tractor’s drive shaft is coupled to the wheel. In this manner, their crazy invention grinds their grain. But it is quite dangerous when in operation.

It is Tim’s most coveted job to work the grinder, and Jacob’s most coveted job to bring over the heavy drums of grain. Though they both could use my help, again I ran into the vociferous problem of cutting in on their identities when I lent a hand.

No one here has more of an identity crisis Jacob. Being from Canada, he is a long way from home. Also he is young and not a very big guy. So when I offered to help him with the drums, it was okay as long as I didn’t help him with the heavy ones. The corn is the heaviest, and Jacob became quite stressed if I motioned to help him with it. Also, there are two hand trucks. Jacob held on to the good hand truck as if it part of his own arm. Even if I needed it for only a few minutes, he was not going to let it go. He was so

afraid of winding up with the poor hand truck because moving drums with it was quite hard. Jacob was quite put out that I was taking his work from him.

But Jacob, John, and Dennis are not the only ones who show this pattern. I watched Tim to get a feel for what he was doing. He was getting tired after a while lifting heavy ground grain into empty drums. Tim is quite strong. I offered to help, but his response was, "This grinding job is a very important one Brother Mark. I had to be here for over six months before they let me get near it. Now it's my job."

Jacob had taken a cue from John and Dennis. He was suddenly being contentious to me, which is out of character. After the grinding job was done, I ventured to ask Jacob where all the other guys were and what we were to do next. He shunned me saying, "Don't ask me, go ask Brother Dave." Knowing that Dave is usually where the action is, I went to look for him in Fellowship Hall.

There I found my old lady friend Sarah working away as usual. She is always cheerful though heavily worked. My only guess to why she stays here while she is as dismayed by these people as I am is she may have found some purpose or protection here. It is hard to believe a woman like her can live without the important values of love and friendship. I have no doubt that these people have developed a bond to each other and would stand behind each other in a crisis, but that's basic good human nature, however it appears they don't really like one another.

We were alone in the kitchen area and developed some small talk as usual. She told me more about why she was here, and more about what she was doing at that moment with the various foods. I remembered my question to John, so I posed it to her. "What would happen if I thought you are a wonderful person and you were feeling down, and I gave you a big hug to cheer you up where everyone here saw it?"

With a smile and a look of sadness and concern at once she sighed, "Oh dear, that sort of thing is forbidden here."

"Why, this is a normal thing. I personally don't go around hugging people, but I reserve that right."

"I don't know, it just never happens. That would cause a big trouble," she said.

Just then, Dennis popped his head in through the back door catching my attention.. He had been gone somewhere all morning.

"Hey, I haven't seen you all day. We all been working, what you been doing?" I asked.

"What I was assigned to do in the Glory of God Brother Mark," Dennis replied. He was playing games again.

"Never mind Brother Dennis, just go away," I said, and he left laughing at me. I wasn't angry; it was just Dennis' way of having fun.

I finally found Dave with some other men, and he suggested we find some inside work to do until the weather cleared. If we were going to work with food, I needed to wash my hands. I stepped outside to the hand pump, but I could find no soap. There is always abundant soap in the out house, so I went there and brought a new bar to the sink pump so that there would be soap there for later. Usually all one can find at the pump is little tinny left over pieces of soap which barely stay in your hand as you try to use them. Who could balk at a nice new bar on hand? This act has importance for what I will write further down.

I went to the root house to find and help Enoch with the sorting. Enoch and I could work in silence now that I know the routine. Enoch is not one for conversation. He just listens to the ever present sound of the repetitive *Overcomer Broadcast* coming into every place all day and night and hums and whispers to himself in deep thought. Wayne and Greg came into the root house an hour later to find some hydrogen-peroxide (OH).

Wayne and Enoch talked about the benefits of OH between each other, and how they could better make it. I listened and then added a comment. “You know, I need to get some OH too. Hopefully it’s part of something else I can use to brush my teeth. I don’t trust the fluoride that is in most tooth paste, it’s poisonous.”

“Take some of ours Brother Mark,” Enoch said.

“I stopped using tooth paste because of the fluoride,” said Wayne.

“I’ve tried baking soda, but my teeth won’t be white. But that fluoride is dangerous,” I said.

“What do you use Brother Mark?” asked Wayne.

“I’ve only got the regular old tooth paste for now. I can’t think of what else to use.”

“Kind of ‘brushing with the fluoride on faith hey Brother Mark? On faith?” Wayne mocked. He was playing “tit for tat,” and he had me on it too.

5

At about 15:30, Dave called for all the men. He had decided that the rain was not going to start and that we had better go get that wood he saw. There was also some valuable cherry wood which he saw on a second pass during the day, and he dearly wanted it too. Cherry wood tea is good for what ails you. So I went to my room to get Doug’s boots after loading the tools on the big truck, and I passed Troy along the way. He was proudly wearing his ski cap I gave him.

From the truck bed, I watched the houses and farms of the town go by. What a quiet little community this is. San Diego was like it once, but not any more. Dave and Wayne were in the cab, the rest of us sat in the cold wind. Doug, Simon and Enoch were talking about Biblical numerology, which I know a lot about. It appeared they had reached the limit of their knowledge, so I filled in some blanks for them. They were glad to hear what I had to say until I told them that only the King James Bible fit the numbering system of God exactly. Once I mentioned the King James Bible, they all looked away. I mentioned Edward Vallowe’s book on Bible numbers, but they were no longer interested. Our conversations ended when the truck stopped and Dave got out of the cab. He caught a fragment of what we were talking about and made a comment to me.

“Brother Mark, are you still trying to push the King James Version of the Bible on these guys?” Dave asked snidely.

The realization that Dave was being reported to on everything I say sunk in at that moment. I had not brought the King James subject up around Dave, only to Dennis and John, yet he used the word “still” in his remark. Big Dave is always watching!

There were three chain saws with us on the truck. The mangled mess of downed trees dictated that all three would be needed. But running a chain saw is a “higher” duty, and a mere “lesser brother” it seems is not anointed to use them. I did not know this of

course, and when Wayne and Enoch grabbed one each, and one was left with no one volunteering to use it, I grabbed it. I'm an old hand at chain saws, so this is a natural reaction for me. I soon found out the errors of my ways when Dave announced, "Brother Mark, you go put that saw back on the truck. We have an operator already. Go put it back on the truck." So I put the saw down and started hauling wood out of the mud and muck and twisted branches. Then later Simon walked up and grabbed the chain saw without a word of protest from Dave. Now I understood. Simon is cool, the rest of us are slaves.

Loading the wet dirty logs is heavy hard work. I kept up with the boys though. The logs were cut as long as possible for one or two men to lift it to the truck and trailer. I fell in the mud a few times while carrying some big ones, but it was a lot of fun. I liked getting dirty and tired today, but I'm running out of clean laundry!

Back at the farm, we were standing around admiring our load. I was thinking out loud and made a comment while we were all standing there. "Boy, unloading will be a lot easier than loading," I said, "because all we have to do is hang them off the end and lop off pieces."

Dave heard that, of course, and barked, "Brother Mark, don't tell us how to do our job. We've been doing this for a long time. We know exactly what we're going to do, and we don't need your input."

This time I defended myself. "Allow me to think out loud. I'm not telling anything, just commenting that we could. That's all."

"Oh we could. That's all huh? You just keep quiet and we'll tell you where to be when the time comes. You're not here to think for yourself." Dave retorted.

Of course I was right because they did exactly what I guessed we would do. We cut and stacked wood directly off the back end of the trailer and finished just as the dinner bell rang at 17:30

6

We were very dirty when we arrived for dinner. The men gathered around at the water pump to wash up. They stumbled around looking for soap slivers to use as usual, but I remembered that I brought a new bar to the pump earlier and started looking for it. It was not there.

"I wonder where that bar of soap went?" I thought aloud.

"What are you looking for Brother Mark?" Dave injected.

"I put some soap here at lunch so we wouldn't have trouble finding soap to clean up before supper. It's not here."

"What soap! We have soap!" he snapped as he held up a tiny sliver in his wet fingers. "

"Oh, but I put a whole new one here somewhere."

"You brought one from where?" Dave asked now panting feverishly.

"I found some in the out house."

"Brother," Dave said while shaking his head and making a disgusted motion with his body, "you don't do that. You don't decide to do anything on your own here. We will get the soap if we think we need it. I can see now that we're going to have to get real rough on you if you don't shape up"

I stood looking at him askance without saying a word.

“Look,” he continued while getting his face into mine, “you don’t even hear me. You’re not even listening!” But I was quite defiant. I really despise this guy now after all I have done to try to get along. Dave is a ridiculous fool. I had a mind to slug him right off, but Jesus was right there with me and kept me cool. I was quite tired from working hard and enthusiastically all day, and I came very close to causing him some real pain over his attitude toward me.

After dinner I went with Wayne again to the dairy. Wayne mumbled something shameful at me, but when I pressed him to repeat it, he laughed and denied he ever said anything, so I let it go. Dave was nowhere in sight. Wayne had me and two small boys begin to help him with the cows. The cows were eager to eat. Wayne was teaching me some things when suddenly Dave’s voice roared in again.

“Now Brother Mark, I told you that the cows don’t know you and for you to let them alone. You can stay, but just get out of the way,” Dave said as he came out from nowhere. None the less, as soon as I heard his voice, I was already motivating myself out the door. Wayne knew that would happen - he set me up!

7

It is now my perspective that most of the run-ins I’ve had with Dave have been set-ups. Dave has used these set-ups to strengthen his grip on the others. Who would oppose him if they saw the consequences first hand. And, by the way the guys talk, I’m not the first one who has received such treatment. Dave’s practiced and clever choice of words have put an emotional grip upon these men. Between Dave and me, today was a disaster. I won’t stay to next week if he keeps this up, let alone three whole months.

I could not sleep tonight wondering what to do. I decided I need to make a telephone call. In the Fellowship Hall, there is a telephone. All long distance calls from there are paid for by the *Overcomer*, but I did not come here to take from them, and also I want no record of the call, so I paid for it on my card. At midnight, while everyone was sleeping, I went and made a call to San Diego - it was only 21:00 there - to friends James and Juliet. They too listen to the *Overcomer* over short-wave and were interested in what I discovered here. They both come on the line.

“Well, you won’t believe what I’ve found here. They have treated me so badly on a personal level, I’m beside myself.” I exclaimed, “Here we have a full fledged cult. Mind control, restrictions, the whole bit. All except violence. It stumps me how they call themselves Christians.” I told them a lot of things about how “Orwellian” it is here. It is an enigma that these folks hate the New World Order, and yet have created it in full force on a small scale.

“In front of me by the phone was a sign that reads “BE PLEASANT,” and I noticed those little signs all around,” I said.

“It sounds creepy Mark. It reminds me of the sigh “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING” of George Orwell’s book ‘1984’. It is Aldus Huxley’s “Brave New World” there. A cast society at its best?” said Juliet. “I could have guessed you’d not be accepted there. You’re against that type of mentality because you know the Truth in Jesus. Sounds like Stair has built himself a little kingdomship.”

“You should know Mark,” James said, “You say that you are in no physical danger there, but consider this. Should you be allowing people to treat you like that?”

There's nothing wrong with you that makes me think you caused it. In fact I'd just take off right now were I you. Man, I'd have said 'up yours' to them the first day."

"There's another danger too Mr. Mark. "Juliet was speaking again. "The longer you are there and see that, the more you'll grow to accept it. You may think you're strong and that Dave does not effect you, but by now I'm sure you've seen what God wants you to see. Don't tempt God, take heed for your soul and get the hell out of there if it's that bad. I'm sure you're not exaggerating to us. That's our advice Mark."

"I'm going to give it one more day to finish off a week. If things don't improve, I'm out of here," I said.

"Listen, if you come back here, leave the Texas accent behind. You sound like you were born there. And don't bring any 'truth' and 'praise your name' sayings back with you either! Ha ha ha. Deal?" Juliet said.

"Deal," I said and we hung up.

No love, no lives, no identities, no property, not liberty, these people are puppets on a jester's emotional strings dancing to someone else's tune. These folks need so much prayer. It is so easy for some to let all go and be fed and taken care of without any responsibilities. A true child of God though has his own identity to live by. There is only one master that is in heaven. So sad is this people's reality, yet they have no longer anywhere else to go. It does not dismiss the fact that they gave up on themselves voluntarily. They forgot that the prophets and the preachers are servants, not rulers. There are no god-men.

Oh thank God for Truth and the Word. Amen.

Chapter 9

Update Added Days Later

So it was at this point I decided to leave. I hesitated a bit as I left the room while a week of memories flashed in my head. I walked over to the Fellowship Hall telephone and placed a call to my mother in San Diego. It was only 21:00 there.

“Hello mother-dear. It’s me”

“Mark, I haven’t heard from you in a week. Are you learning to farm?”

“A little. But I’m heading your way again. I’ll probably see you in a week. I’ll might stop in Texas first.”

“Why honey, you just got there.”

“Mom, these people have treated me just horribly.”

“Oh my gosh. Are you in any danger?! Why are you leaving in the middle of the night? Have they done any thing to you? Are you sure you can get away from there?...”

“It’s not that dramatic. Hold on with the worrisome questions. There is not physical danger. For the most part, these folks are harmless and decent in most regards. I’ll tell you the whole story when I see you soon. I’m leaving now because I’m finished here. However, if I wait until day light when everyone is up, I’m not so sure it will be as easy to leave. It’s just a feeling I have.”

“What’s the number there?! Who’s the head guy?! If I don’t hear from you in the morning, I’m tracking you down. Now I’m so worried about you I can hardly stand it.”

“If you must have the number, it is 803-538-3892 or 4202. But don’t call! Gee, you’ll embarrass me terribly. The head guy is called Ralph G. Stair. He’ll be nice enough to you if you get him. I don’t think he has the whole picture of what goes on here under this guy Dave I’ve been dealing with. Don’t call though.”

Mom was frantic now. “You should never have gone off and trusted someone you have only talked to over the telephone! I don’t care how long you’ve known him. As soon! As soon as you get to another phone, you call me and let me know you are all right.”

“I will mom.”

I took one more peak into my room to make sure I left it tidy and that the Larson book was prominently displayed. The van had not been started in a week and it was tired from the trip. Would it start right away? Yes it fired right up without a hitch! I moved out of there like I was being carried. I even made sure I shut the main gate behind me on the way out.

I forgot to call my mother. A lot was on my mind. I drove all night and all the next day. I caught a few hours sleep in the van and drove all the next night until I reached Brother Ben’s house in Gladewater Texas at 8:00 Saturday morning. That was thirty one hours of straight driving.

Ben was just getting up and was amazed to see me. He said he was just speaking to Carol about me yesterday and made a prediction that I would be back this very weekend. He was shocked to have it come true. When I finished telling my story to Ben, I went over to Mike’s and Carol’s house. They both confirmed Ben’s prediction!

Then I learned that my poor mother had been calling to Mike’s and Carol’s place frantically from the time she didn’t hear from me. I forgot my poor parents. What a

worry they must have had! Boy was my heart sorry for that mistake! When they found me safe, mom deservedly let me know that I was off the good guy list for a while. While they were wondering about me, my dad had called Ralph Stair and asked where I was. Stair indicated that I left in the night for “no apparent reason”.

It is so good to have people in the real world who care.

I wanted to stay in Texas, but I came back to California anyway where I vowed that this account should get out for the pure sake that it is the truth. Possibly someone out there might find the account helpful in their life.

The End.

If you are in a situation like the people described in the above account, I urge you to do some research whenever possible about what you are involved up in. Despite the emotional draw, despite the hardship of the loss of your social network, despite the possibility of having to be on your own without the support of others, it will be better for you to get out and be a strong self standing individual of your own mind than to be under someone else’s control. As you see, with a sound outlook on things, I was not captivated by the *Overcomer’s* line of indoctrination.

Please say a prayer to God for the people I wrote about, and pray that anyone else like them will find a true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ such that they can be released from Satan’s bondage.

And Dave claimed I didn’t hear a word he said!

Just to be sure you understand me...

Of late it has been the desire of many people to live amongst others who think and feel the way that they do. There is nothing wrong with this. Those people who are aware of the coming New World Order freight train - out of Hell itself - want nothing to do with it. As well, many millions are aware of the intrusions into their daily lives by an oppressive government which seeks constantly to seize properties through taxation and unjust laws.

The revelations that are sweeping this world are bringing back a resurgence to a Biblical based Christianity. These Christians are rejecting the established churches and the pagan sabbaths. Some are so attracted to this trend that they do not put the necessary time into studying the various preachers who offer them the message they seek. In any human endeavor, there are those who will try to capitalize upon the gullible.

I will be very happy to find a group of people, who feel the way I do, to live around and fellowship with - retaining my life, liberty and property - as the Lord would have us to do. So do not be mistaken when I have presented the following account that I am against a community of people separating themselves from the evils of the decadent society we find in the general population. It is a great and responsible thing to love yourself and your children to want to live and raise in a moral Godly setting.

What I do oppose is that a man or men will self appoint themselves an oligarchy over a society of people. This is of course what the united States of America were supposedly organized to prevent by a Representative Republic of men serving each other.

By all means, if you, like I, feel it is the time of the end where God is going to judge now the evil heights of depravity which our societies lust after, get out of the cities and live with like minded people on the land. But do your homework first.

Secondly, if you think I am encouraging public license for any government agency to attack the *Overcomer* or its people, think far from it. Those people have made their choice and are going to answer to their own circumstances. God will give each individual the strength to overcome when he has made the choice that enough is enough. The *Overcomer* is an otherwise benign organization which seeks after its own ends.

Mark Murtomaki
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3/26/96

Ralph G. Stair
c/o P. O. Box 691
Walterboro, S.Carolina 29488

Ralph G. Stair;

After great thought, after much debate within myself in prayer, I have been compelled to publish the enclosed manuscript.

Because the topic is about the Overcomer, I thought it honorable to send you a copy first. I will be sending it en-mass to whom ever requests it.

I must express that I felt so mistreated by your "staff", and had witnessed much abuse of the Christian ethic while in my visit there, that it has weighed heavy on me that God would like this truth known.

In the scheme of world events, it seems a small matter what I have written. However, you personally may possibly benefit from this first hand account of how an educated, hard working, God fearing, and dedicated man such as myself, was treated by your people.

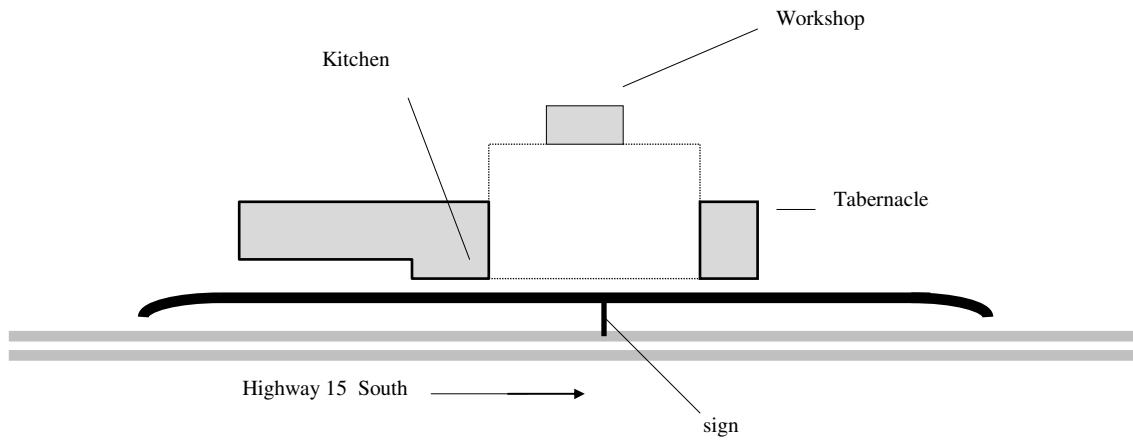
I left quite a bit out of the account which might be taken as slanderous, however what remains is as truthful as I can possibly remember it. Still, there is no substitute for being in the presence of abusive persons to view their body and facial expressions. Because you are no stranger to abusing persons, you will not find the account shocking. However, the general Christian public has another view of how to treat right and honorable Christian fellows.

When your man David chose to try to destroy me, he failed miserably. Now he shall reap what he sewed. Vengeance is the Lord's. I shall only continue to tell people the truth so that others can avoid falling into organizations which may seek to take away their very identifies and force them into an inescapable situation such as your members exist in today.

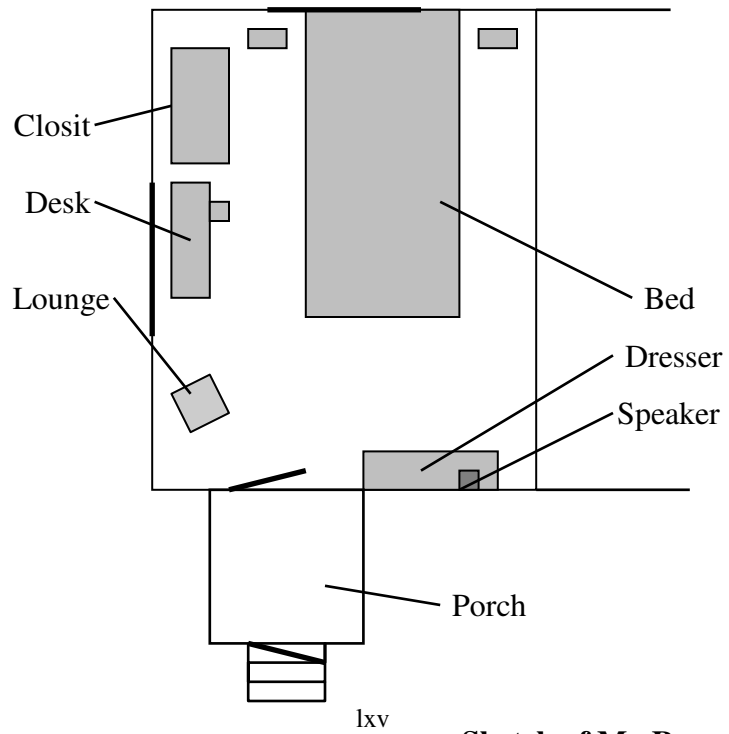
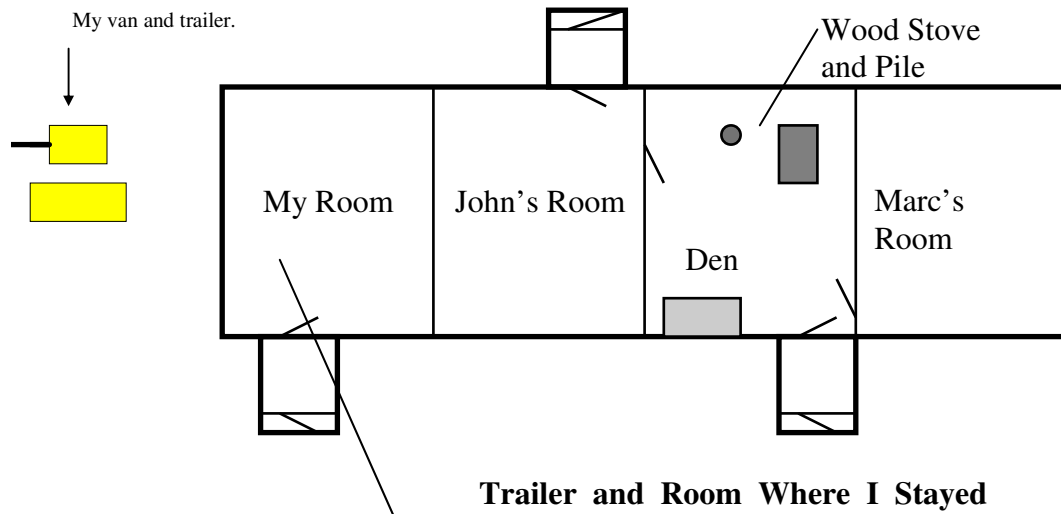
Tell Dennis that I meant what I said. He's a MAN and not your 'nigger'! I pray diligently that the lovely people living at the Overcomer stand up and reclaim their faith in the Creator who created them free from involuntary servitude, to serve Him, and not some man, however great that man proclaims to be. I pray then for you as well, that the good things you have done to bring the Word of God to the world will go rewarded, but that you will again find your sanity and save your soul.

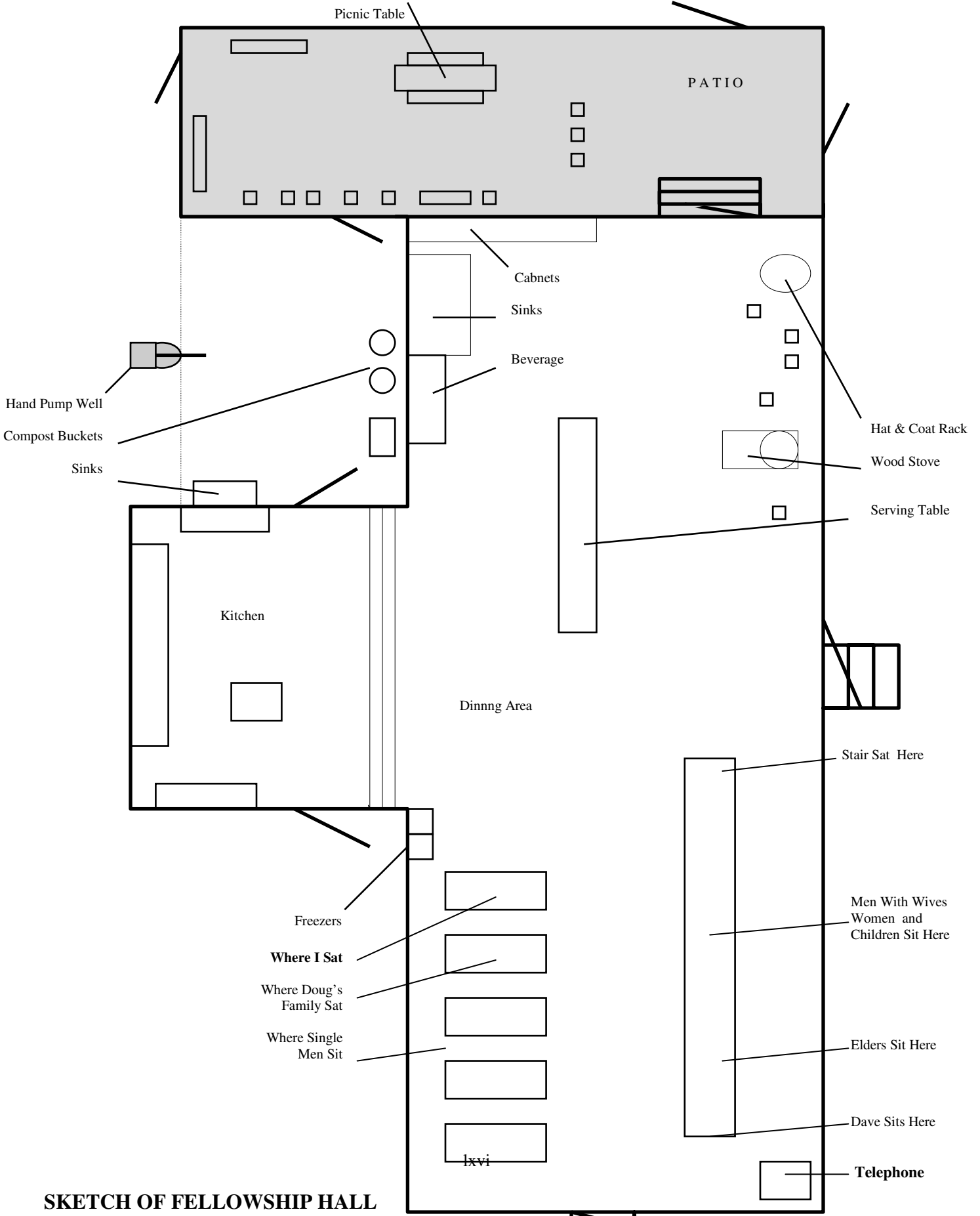
Sincerely your servant in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior,

Signed Mark Murtomaki



Sketch of Overcomer Campground





SKETCH OF FELLOWSHIP HALL

